Saviours of Islamic Spirit

SHAYKH ABŪ 'L-ḤASAN ʿALĪ NADWĪ

Revised & Edited by

ABDUR-RAHMAN
IBN YUSUF MANGERA

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī
Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal
ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī
ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz
Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī
ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām
Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī
Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī
Nūr al-Dīn Zangī
The Tartars

White Thread
PRESS

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Saviours of Islamic Spirit

In the name of Allāh, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

All praise be to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger Muḥammad, Mercy to the Worlds.

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Volume 1

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White Thread
PRESS

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They wish to put His light out with
their mouths. But He will perfect His light,
even though the disbelievers hate it.

The Glorious Qur'ān 61:8

Islam has a staying power above that of all other religious faiths. Its scripture remains intact and uncorrupted in the original language of its revelation over fourteen centuries ago. Its Prophet is loved and revered as much as he ever was. Its way of life is faithfully adhered to by many. It is the religion of at least a fifth of the world's population. It is an active mechanism that binds a diverse multi-ethnic community across the world as one Umma.

Despair ought never to be a quality of the believer.

A Qur'ānic Maxim

TRANSLITERATION KEY

ء ٱ	' (A slight catch in the breath. It is also used to indicate where the *hamza* has been dropped from the beginning of a word.)
ا	a, ā
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th (Should be pronounced as the *th* in *thin* or *thirst*.)
ج	j
ح	ḥ (Tensely breathed *h* sound.)
خ	kh (Pronounced like the *ch* in Scottish *loch* with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
د	d
ذ	dh (Should be pronounced as the *th* in *this* or *that*.)
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ (A heavy *s* pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ض	ḍ (A heavy *d/dh* pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ط	ṭ (A heavy *t* pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ظ	ẓ (A heavy *dh* pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ع	ʿ, ʿa, ʿi, ʿu (Pronounced from the throat.)
غ	gh (Pronounced like a throaty French *r* with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ف	f
ق	q (A guttural *q* sound with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
و	w, ū, u.
ه	h
ي	y, ī, i

ﷺ *Ṣalla 'Llāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*—used following the mention of the Messenger Muḥammad, translated as, "May Allāh bless him and give him peace."

ﷺ *ʿAlayhi 'l-salām*—used following the mention of a prophet or messenger of Allāh, translated as, "Upon him be peace."

ﷺ *Raḍiya 'Llāhu ʿanhu*—used following the mention of a Companion of the Messenger ﷺ, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with him."

ﷺ *Raḍiya 'Llāhu ʿanhā*—used following the mention of a female Companion of the Messenger ﷺ, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with her."

ﷺ *Raḥimahu 'Llāh*—used following the mention of a scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on him."

ﷺ *Raḥimahumu 'Llāh*—used following the mention of more than one scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on them."

Contents

Introduction 13
Preface 29

1. *ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz* 35
Revival Efforts of the First Century 35; Religious Teachers of the Umayyad Period 36; Political Revolution 37; Accession of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 37; Character of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 39; Solicitude for Moral Reformation 42; Compilation of Ḥadīths 43; Defender of Faith 44; Propagation of Islam 49; Financial Reforms 50; ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's Death 51

2. *Ḥasan al-Baṣrī* 53
Decline of Faith and Rise of Moral Decadence 53; Endeavors to Combat Evil 54; Capabilities of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī 54; Sermons of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī 56; Fearlessness 59; Hypocrites 60; Indication of Hypocrisy 61; Death of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī 62; Revolts against Tyranny 63

3. *The Ḥadīth Masters & Jurists* 65
The Abbasids 65; Some Preachers of Baghdad 66; Two Urgent Problems 67; Compilation of Ḥadīth 69; Diligence of the Ḥadīth Masters 69; Biographical Evaluation 70; Trustworthiness of Ḥadīth Masters 71; Retentive Memory of Ḥadīth Masters 72; Popular Enthusiasm 73; The Six Authentic Collections (*Ṣiḥāḥ Sitta*) 73; Compilation of Jurisprudence 74; The Four Jurists of Islam 74; Disciples of the Four Jurists 75; Benefits of Jurisprudence 76

4. *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* 77
Metaphysics 77; Muʿtazilism 78; Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal 79; Dispute over the Createdness of the Qur'ān 86; Calamity Befalls Aḥmad 87; Aḥmad's Account of His Sufferings 88; Steadfastness of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal 90; Achievements of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal 90

5. *Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī* 93
The Crisis of Muʿtazilism 93; The Man Demanded by the Faith 94; Imām Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī 94; Ashʿarī's Zeal to Propagate and Establish the Truth 95; The Achievements of Ashʿarī 96; The Middle Course of Ashʿarī 97; Ashʿarī's Works 100; Profound Knowledge and Piety 101; Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī 101; Later Ashʿarīs 102

6. *Decline of Theology & Ascendency of Hellenistic Philosophy* 105
Philosophic and Esoteric Schools 105; Popularity of Hellenistic Philosophy 106; Arab Philosophers 106; The Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā') 107; The Muʿtazilīs and Philosophers 107; The Bāṭinīs (Esoterics) 108; Esoteric and Exoteric Interpretations of the Scripture 109; The Traitors of Islam 111

7. *Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī* 115
Ghazālī's Intellectual Crisis 116; From Seclusion to Public Life 121; Ghazālī's Revival Efforts 123; Encounters with Philosophy 123; Effect of *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* 126; Attack on the Bāṭinīs 126; Ghazālī's Social Critique and the *Iḥyā'* 126; Ghazālī's Critique of Society 128; The Religious Scholars 129; Critique of the Rulers and Kings 135; Other Classes of Muslim Society 139; Purpose of the *Iḥyā'* 142; Ethical Philosophy of Ghazālī 143; Yearning for Honor 144; Introspection and Self-Critique 148; Critics of the *Iḥyā'* 152; Ghazālī and Theology (*ʿIlm al-Kalām*) 153; Ghazālī's Refusal to Return to Baghdad 155; Ghazālī's Death 157; Two Outstanding Qualities of Ghazālī 158; Impact of Ghazālī 160; Reformers after Ghazālī 160; The Two Preachers of Baghdad 162

8. *ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* 163
Popular Enthusiasm 163; Moral Excellence 164; Reassurance to the Dejected 165; Teaching and Propagation Work 166; Certitude of Knowledge 167; Trust in Allāh 168; Love of Humanity 169; The Times of ʿAbd al-Qādir 169; Sermons of ʿAbd al-Qādir 171; Oneness of the Divine Being 171; Refuge of the Brokenhearted 174; Worldly Pleasures 175; Critique of the Kings 176; Concern for Moral Rectitude 177; Reform and Renovation 178; ʿAbd al-Qādir's Influence 180; His Death 181

9. *Abū 'l-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī* 183
Early Life 183; Passion for Ḥadīth 184; Prolific Writings of Ibn al-Jawzī 184; Piety and Inclination to Worship 184; Profile and Character 186; Lofty Aspiration and Encyclopedic Knowledge 186; Popular Enthusiasm 188; Critical Literary Endeavors 189; Critique of Scholars and Administrators 189; *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* (Captured Thoughts) 193; Dialogue with the Self 195; Importance of Studying the Lives of the Pious Predecessors 198; Writing the Biographies of the Righteous 199; Importance of Studying History 199; Historical Writings 201; Oratory of Ibn al-Jawzī 201; Death 202

10. *Nūr al-Dīn Zangī & Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī* 203
The Crusaders 203; Atābek ʿImād al-Dīn Zangī 205; Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Nūr al-Dīn Zangī 206; Character of Nūr al-Dīn 207; Unflinching Faith 209

SULTAN ṢALĀḤ AL-DĪN AL-AYYŪBĪ 210
Transformation of His Life 211; Enthusiasm for *Jihād* 211; Conclusive Battle of Hattin 212; Religious Ardor of the Sultan 213; Conquest of Jerusalem 214; Benevolence of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 214; The Third Crusade 216; Negotiations of Peace 216; Death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 218; The Saintly Sultan 219; Character of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 220; Courage and Fortitude 222; Knowledge and Scholarship 224; Collapse of the Fāṭimids 224

11. *ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām* 229
Scholarship of ʿIzz al-Dīn 229; Righteousness of ʿIzz al-Dīn 230; Courage of ʿIzz al-Dīn before the Ruler of Syria 232; ʿIzz al-Dīn in Egypt 234; Fearlessness of ʿIzz al-Dīn 234; *Jihād* with the Crusaders 235; Auctioning the State Dignitaries 236; ʿIzz al-Dīn and the Kings of Egypt 237; Sublime Character 238; Enjoining Virtue and Forbidding Evil 238; Writings of ʿIzz al-Dīn 240; ʿIzz al-Dīn's Death 240

12. *The Tartars: The Scourge of God* 243
Causes of the Tartar Invasion 243; Khwārizm Shāh's Folly 250; The Tartar Invasion 251; Sack of Baghdad 254; Mongol Conversion 258

Bibliography 269
Index 275

Introduction

IN THE NAME OF ALLĀH Most Gracious Most Merciful. All praise is to Allāh Almighty, through whose subtle power acts come to be, through whose benevolence and generosity hopes are achieved, through whose decree events occur, by whose will states change; and to Him is our return and with Him is the final abode. Glorified is He, the enduring without end, transcendent of place and movement, knower of the unseen and the seen. We praise Him for the bounties and gifts He has poured on us, praise that is not outweighed by mountains, to the amount of the heavens and the earth, and perpetually for all time. We invoke blessings and peace on His Messenger, the Prophet of Mercy, our Ultimate Benefactor, Muḥammad son of ʿAbdullāh, possessor of elegance, beauty, knowledge, and perfection. May Allāh bless him, the angels, the prophets, their pure descendants, and the family of Muḥammad, his companions, and those who have followed him in excellence. May He forgive us our trespasses and gather us in the company of the righteous, and grant us adherence to the prophetic path so long as we live.

Throughout history, the Umma has faced many challenges, with periods of immense greatness, as well as stagnation and upheaval. It has faced countless attacks, in which enemy forces conspired to bring about its destruction and corrupt it from within. Its cities have been razed to the ground, its Deity accused of violence, its scripture misunderstood, its prophet scorned, its history deplored, its heritage maligned, its community condemned, its scholars slain, its activists persecuted, its well-wishers silenced, its teachings distorted. It has suffered from internal assault. Many of its own followers have brought it into disrepute, misinterpreted its teachings, misapplied its force, and committed injustices in its name, thereby contributing to the environment of Islamophobia and further invigorating those who seek to annihilate it.

History has recorded this oscillation in detail, and any avid reader of history would not be surprised to see the cycle in motion yet again.

Despite being taken many times to the brink of destruction, Islam has always re-emerged as a force to be reckoned with. Islam has a staying power above that of all other religious faiths. Its scripture remains intact and uncorrupted in the original language of its revelation over fourteen centuries ago. Its Prophet is loved and revered as much as he ever was. Its way of life is faithfully adhered to by many. It is the religion of at least a fifth of the world's population. It is an active mechanism that binds a diverse multi-ethnic community across the world as one Umma. Saying the *salām*, the universal Islamic greeting of peace, to another Muslim anywhere in the world breaks down barriers, elicits a friendly smile, and emanates a feeling of comfort and security. Muslims are able to break bread together in the name of Allāh (*bismillāh*) and eat from the same platter, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic background. During a recent visit to Senegal, a group of Britons of South Asian descent, myself among them, sat alongside several guests of various African tribes, eating couscous comfortably with our hands from the same platter as our African host, whom we had met for the first time only an hour earlier. A scholar of eighty-two years in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, told us that the only reason he had decided to meet us was our faith, and that was our motivation in meeting him as well. Muslims the world over still unite on the formula of *tawḥīd*, "There is no god but Allāh, and Muḥammad is His Messenger."

Eternally binding the Umma is faith in Allāh and His Prophet ﷺ. Allāh says in the Qur'ān, "The believers are brothers" (Q 49:10). The stronger the faith, the greater the bond of brotherhood. The Prophet of Allāh ﷺ said, "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with sleeplessness and fever" (*Bukhārī, Muslim*). Thus, with faith comes compassion, kindness, and sympathy. People of other faiths often find it difficult to comprehend the love that Muslims have for their Prophet and why they care so deeply for anything perceived as an attack against him. Anyone who so much as glances through a biography and the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ with true objectivity should at least recognize that his character, compassion, empathy for humanity, and complete moral rectitude make him an exceptional human being. For the believer, these qualities create a love of awe and esteem, and the continual discovery of his excellent qualities deepens this love still further.

This book, by the late Indian historian and intellectual, Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Nadwī (may Allāh be pleased with him), is a story of the ebbs and flows of this Umma; the challenges, the setbacks, and most importantly, the successes. It is a poignant story of the accomplishments, attainments, and triumphs that propelled the Umma forward. It is a story told through extraordinary figures: the revivers, men of courage, vigor, and zeal, an elect group who were graced with divine determination to safeguard the spirit of God's religion on earth. In other words, they were the saviours of the Islamic spirit.

Through the arduous efforts of these saviours, Islam is very much intact and will continue to thrive, as divinely foretold. "They wish to put His light out with their mouths. But He will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers hate it" (Q 61:8). This is a clear promise of Allāh that has remained unbroken for over fourteen centuries.

Our purpose in republishing this book is to offer comfort and much-needed perspective, given the current situation of Muslims around the world. We aim to inspire Muslim youth and others to goodness and love of Allāh, and to provide role models of intellectual and spiritual excellence, at a time when people are looking for motivation from other sources, such as popular culture. Many people live in the vacuum of modern times—a low period, in the view of many, for ethics, culture, and religion. Looking back at the immediate past does not provide much optimism, as it appears to be filled with despair. However, studying the history of the centuries beyond reminds us that we are not in the direst of situations. In fact, we have confronted much worse in history.

If the Aqsa Mosque is currently under siege, then in the past it was stripped from Muslim control for nearly a century. From 1099 to 1187, it was lost to the Crusaders, during which time thousands of Muslims were killed inside its sacred precincts after falsely being promised refuge, an orgy of death in which the Crusaders boasted of being knee high in blood. During this period no call to prayer sounded from its minaret, no Qur'ān recital reverberated around its dome, no sermon embellished its pulpit, no forehead touched down in its niche, while its walls yearned for its worshippers to return. A golden cross was mounted atop the Dome of the Rock, which was renamed the Templum Domini, and the Aqsa Mosque was turned into a palace. The adjoining areas were used as royal stables.

If Baghdad has been damaged by the shock and awe of recent campaigns, it has experienced much worse. The Tartars, after ravaging many of the Muslim cities in Transoxiana and Khurasan, leveling them to the ground, advanced

to commit huge massacres in the capital of the Muslim empire. Records indicate that well over a million people were slaughtered in Baghdad alone, and the caliph was rolled up in a carpet and beaten to death. The Muslims of Baghdad were compelled to participate in drinking bouts during the month of Ramaḍān, while wine was sprinkled in the mosques and the call for prayer was prohibited.

During the time of Imām Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), a hundred or so years before the end of the first Islamic millennium, popular discussion focused on the end of the world, similar to the discussions prevalent today. Imām Suyūṭī wrote a book called *Al-Kashf ʿan Mujāwazat hādhihī al-Umma al-Alf* (Treatise on the Passage of this Umma through the Millennium) to provide optimism and to reject the notion that the end of the world was predicted to be before the millennium in any reliable narration. Now we live four centuries hence, and the Day of Judgment has not yet arrived.[1]

Allāh says, "They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, 'When will it happen?' Say, 'My Lord alone has knowledge of it: He alone will reveal when its time will come, a time that is momentous in both the heavens and earth. All too suddenly it will come upon you.' They ask you about it as if you were eager [to find out]. Say, 'God alone has knowledge of [when it will come], though most people do not realize it'" (7:187). Allāh says, "People ask you about the Hour. Say, 'God alone has knowledge of it.' How could you [Prophet] know? The Hour may well be near" (33:63). He also says, "They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, saying, 'When will it arrive?' but how can you tell [them that]? Its time is known only to your Lord; you are only sent to warn those

1 Imām Suyūṭī did predict though that the world would not endure beyond 1500 AH. However, the same calculations he used during his time to dispel the notion of the apocalypse taking place at the first Islamic millennium can now be used to dispel it happening at 1500 or before it too. He states that the reason the world could not end at the first millennium was because the critical signs prophesied to herald the last day had not yet come to pass. He quotes a number of narrations and posits that the duration of the world is to be seven thousand years. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ came toward the end of the sixth millennium. Dajjāl will emerge at the turn of a century, followed by Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ, who will kill him and then remain for forty years in the world. People are then to remain in this world for 120 years after the rising of the sun from its setting place. There will be forty years between the two blasts of the trumpet. This amounts to two hundred years in total that are necessary to pass before the Final Hour. He states that now only 102 years remain (as he appears to be writing this in 898/1493) till the close of the millennium and none of these events have yet occurred, nor have any of the other major signs such as the Mahdī or Gog and Magog. So he asks how anyone can think the world will end at the millennium. However, he continues to say that it will end by 1500. We are now in the year 1436, with only sixty-four years to 1500, yet none of the major signs have occurred for us either. So according to his own method of calculation, it will not occur at 1500 either. Allāh knows best.

who fear it. On the Day they see it, it will seem they lingered [in this life] an evening [at most,] or its morning" (79:42–46).

This knowledge is exclusively for Allāh and Him alone. We have no responsibility to seek it out, and in many situations our speculation is counterproductive.

Despite this fact, books, documentaries, and speeches on the impending Armageddon are in no short supply. There are constant discussions of dreams and visions concerning the birth of the Mahdī ﷺ. It is as if people have surrendered hope of justice and reform prior to the coming of the Mahdī and Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ. It is as if people feel secure by postulating such theories. And yet, many pseudo-prophesies of recent times have come to pass while the world continues as it always has.

The Umma has gone through many such downturns when people believed it was ripe for the emergence of Mahdī ﷺ and Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ to lead the Muslims out of worldly misery. However, things always righted themselves and hope and optimism were restored.

What is yet most concerning is that in this eschatological quagmire people have forgotten that their death is an impending reality closer to them than the Mahdī's emergence. We need to be cognizant of our reality and responsibilities. One day we will all individually stand before our Lord to account for our deeds, whether or not Mahdī appeared in our lifetime.

I was in my twenties when I first read *Saviours of Islamic Spirit*, the English translation of Mawlānā Nadwī's *Tārīkh-i Daʿwat wa ʿAẓīmat*. It inspired me and filled me with optimism. Most importantly, it provided a much better perspective of world events and gave me a sense of understanding. I felt that if I had read this book when younger, it would have substantially enhanced my awareness of my faith, its history, and above all the incredible people who have kept it aloft. It gave me an understanding of the hard work that service entails. A person endowed with particular qualities such as a sound mind, intelligence, healthy physique, and wealth but does not put them to serving others has not thanked God for His gifts. However, I learned that true success also requires high aspiration, exertion, and abundant prayers to Allāh for succor and strength. It inspired me to work hard and to do something productive for my faith, to interrogate my intentions constantly, to trust in Allāh's plans for this world, and to submit to His timetable. But above all, it

gave me the desire to be accepted for His service, as the great saviours had been. Here, by way of example, is what I took away from the narratives in this book.

In the caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, I saw an individual who remained unblemished from the corruption that power and wealth often bring, all the while maintaining the trust to preserve the entire Muslim nation. His reign of just over two years demonstrated that a nation can be transformed if the guiding values are honesty, fairness, selflessness, and God-fearingness. Shaykh Ḥasan al-Baṣrī displayed the power of a heart attached to God and the benefit of being nurtured in a pious household. This, coupled with a firm grounding in sacred knowledge, eloquence, and confidence, made for an undeniable power.

Imām Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī's conversion demonstrates that hearts are under the ultimate power of Allāh and that He can still create a Moses inside the house of Pharaoh. His life depicts how a person raised in the center of Muʿtazilī sectarian polemics, heralded as their star debater, pivoted and dealt a crucial blow to the very school that nurtured him. This is how Allāh protects His faith from where one would never have expected.

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was the pioneering sage whose suffering at the hands of his inquisitors highlights the importance of upholding the truth, even in the face of persecution. Through him, we learn that scholarship comes with great responsibility. In this retelling of Imām Aḥmad's life, the general masses' fervent reliance on their scholars for issues of faith is highlighted. Further, it demonstrates how Allāh places love for sincere scholars in the hearts of believers, even those of other faiths.

The most fascinating and inspiring account for me was no doubt that of Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. For him to have abandoned the most prestigious academic post in the Islamic world, rector of the Niẓāmiyya College in Baghdad, purely for the sake of personal reform and attaining proximity to Allāh, uncovers the ultimate triviality of worldly fame and renown when one is summoned by a higher calling. The selections from his autobiography, *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error), are especially pertinent for this age of inquiry and self-exploration. This is a man who began his inquiry with a mind devoid of all affiliations and belief, explored all the well-known sciences of his day, and then concluded that the way of the mystics was the ultimate path to the Divine and eternal salvation. Imām Ghazālī also demonstrates the need for a scholar to be attuned to his social circumstances and to be able to gauge the pulse of laymen to provide appropriate remedies. His *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) is exactly this,

addressing the different levels of society with a clear way for them to connect with their Creator. His life proves that erudition, an active mind, and a heart burning with divine love can inspire generations to come—this despite his being given no more than fifty-five years in this world. Age is only an excuse. Divine enablement (*tawfīq*) is everything.

Following him is the great Ḥanbalī imām Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, one of the finest and most renowned mystics of all time, who arrived in the metropolis of Baghdad after Ghazālī's departure and took up the task of filling the hearts of thousands with the love of God. He had success in reviving the pledge (*bayʿa*) system and sending his disciples across the world to assist thousands in spiritual improvement. His work shows that the authentic Ḥanbalī school is not in opposition to sufism but very much within the orthodox tradition.

Then Baghdad produces Abū 'l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, with whom I also felt strong affinity. A scholar par excellence for whom there was no limit; he was a model of high ambition, time management, and effective execution of goals. He had an insatiable appetite for consuming a diverse range of sciences, with a view to be a master of all and a jack of none. He constantly reflected on events all around, while at the same time tempering this intellectual disposition with a love for the divine and abundant worship. I found the candid confessions and profound reflections in his *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* (Captured Thoughts) extremely beneficial. The *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* reads somewhat like a premodern collection of pithy posts on Twitter or Facebook—though almost always with much greater substance and relevance to posterity—and underscores the necessity of routine and discipline in the life of any serious scholar. It reveals the challenges many scholars face, how one works through them, and above all the necessary thought process essential for such competency.

Subsequently, and at a point of great political turmoil amid the Crusader assault, appears Nūr al-Dīn Zangī and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī. Their story teaches fortitude and resilience in faith, the firmness of a warrior in God's path, and the etiquette with one's enemies, such as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's sending precious ice to his foe Richard during his illness. This is in stark contrast to the current day propaganda put out by so called jihadists, who lack any sense of ethics and real understanding of *jihād*.

Moving on to the Sultan of Scholars, there has perhaps never been a scholar more bold, more confident, and more fearless in speaking for truth and against wrong as ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām. Many scholars are con-

fronted with daunting situations and asked to provide difficult answers to controversial questions. However, very few put their life on the line by openly challenging rulers and the elite to remove social ills or correct wrongs. This was the hallmark of his work.

Finally, we learn of the Tartars, who swept through Muslim lands laying waste to everything in their path, only to end up mere decades later embracing the very same faith they set out to annihilate. This demonstrates the power of Islam to sweep even its archest enemies out of disbelief into faith and lead them eventually to add to Islam's divine splendor.

This work also reveals that protocol can prove indispensable and should be adhered to regardless of the situation. Imām Ghazālī experienced a number of political upheavals in his time. However, his response was never the hasty and superficial solutions we are so accustomed to. He viewed things metaphysically, not politically, and provided timeless guidance accordingly. A connection with the Creator was at the center of his worldview, in which the general masses remained steadfast in piety. A revival of such traditions is required today; not just political activism, but a return to traditional piety, including even such seemingly trivial things as daily prayer litanies, is essential. It was the inner strength of peoples past that gave them endurance to overcome famine, hunger, pestilence, internecine warfare, and ravaging attacks from their enemies. To weather the storms of today requires prayerful recitations, supplications, invocations of blessing on Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, and gatherings of *dhikr*, or remembrance of Allāh—practices that our predecessors attached themselves to. Such practices provide the inner fortitude for one to withstand many challenges and to nurture a heart illuminated by divine remembrance. Unfortunately today, the piety of the Umma as a whole is probably not as strong or resilient as that of the past. Therefore, it is uncertain whether we too can withstand the current turmoil, despite it not being the worst that we have faced. We ask Allāh for strength and divine guidance. Still, this less-than-optimistic impression is my own, as one living in the present, and may be belied yet again by great people of Allāh who will emerge in the fullness of time. If this book should remind us of anything, it is the Qur'ānic maxim that despair ought never to be a quality of the believer.

THE AUTHOR: This introduction would not be complete without an introduction to the author. The Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Ḥasanī Nadwī

(1332/1914–1420/1999), affectionately known as ʿAlī Miyān, was a leading intellectual and religious scholar of contemporary India. He wrote numerous books on history, biography, and contemporary affairs concerning both the Muslim community in India and Muslims abroad. Scion of an illustrious family, which produced many scholars and spiritual personalities, such as Shāh ʿAlamullāh Naqshbandī and Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd, Shaykh Nadwī was the son of Ḥakīm Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥayy, an eminent scholar of his time who authored an eight-volume encyclopedic work called *Nuzhat al-Khawāṭir*, which comprised five thousand or so biographical entries on Muslim jurists, mystics, scholars, and theologians of the Subcontinent.

Shaykh Nadwī's teachers included ʿAllāma Ḥaydar Ḥasan Khān Tonkī and Shaykh al-Islām Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī in ḥadīth, ʿAllāma Aḥmad ʿAlī Lāhōrī in Qur'ānic exegesis, Mawlānā Iʿzāz ʿAlī and Muftī Shiblī Jayrājpūrī Aʿẓamī in jurisprudence, Qārī Aṣghar ʿAlī in Qur'ānic recitation, ʿAllāma Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī in Greek philosophy, and Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī al-Marrākishī in Arabic literature. He studied classical Urdu literature, as well as mastering English in order to keep abreast of contemporary thought and access English sources of history and philosophy. He used this skill with language in his literary works as well as in his travels to Europe and America.

He served as rector of the Nadwat al-ʿUlamā' seminary in Lucknow for a number of years, where he also taught Qur'ānic exegesis, ḥadīth, and Arabic literature, along with history and logic. Apart from his long association with Nadwa (as student, teacher and rector), he served on the advisory committee of Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband, chaired the managing committee of Dār al-Muṣannifīn, Azamgarh, and established the Academy of Islamic Research and Publications at Lucknow. He was invited by numerous organizations and universities for curriculum development or to deliver seminars or serve as a visiting professor. He made multiple visits to Aligarh University, Jamia Millia in Delhi, Faculty of Sharīʿa at Damascus University, Madīna University, King Saud University in Riyadh, and the Universal League of Islamic Literature in Turkey.

He was a founding member of Rabiṭat al-Adab al-Islāmī al-ʿĀlamiyya (Universal League of Islamic Literature) in 1984 and was elected chairman of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board in 1985, a position he held until his death. He was elected member of the Arabic Language Institute of Damascus in 1956 and the Founding Committee of the Muslim World League in 1961.

A prolific writer, he penned a literary legacy of a few hundred works in both Arabic and Urdu. His works have been integrated into the curriculum

in a number of universities in the Arab world. His most notable Arabic work, *Mā-dhā Khasir al-ʿĀlam bi 'nḥiṭāṭ al-Muslimīn* (What Did the World Lose by the Decline of the Muslims?), was widely acclaimed and carved a place for him in elite literary circles of the Arab world. Many of his works have since been translated into Arabic, English, Turkish, Bahasa Indonesia, Persian, and Tamil, among other languages. *Kārwān-i Zindagī*, his eight-volume autobiography; *Purānē Chirāgh* (Ancient Lamps), comprising life sketches of contemporary personalities; his biographies of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahīd and Caliph ʿAlī (may Allāh ennoble his countenance); and his *Tārīkh-i Daʿwat wa ʿAẓīmat* (Saviours of Islamic Spirit) are seen as permanent contributions to Urdu literature.

In his propagation work, he particularly benefited from the great missionary and founder of the Tablīgh Jamāt, Mawlānā Ilyās Kāndhlawī. He also benefitted from the sufi master Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Qādir Rāipūrī, from whom he received his spiritual training, until he became the most senior of his authorized students and held a place very dear to him.

During his second ḥajj in 1951–52, Sayyid Shaybī, the key-bearer of the Kaʿba, invited him into the House of Allāh and permitted him to take inside whomever he chose.

Among the awards he received was the King Faisal International Award for services to Islam in 1980. He was granted an honorary doctorate in literature by Kashmir University in 1981. A literary gathering to pay tribute to him was held in Istanbul in 1996 during the Fourth Conference of the World League of Islamic Literature. He was given the "Islamic Personality of 1998" award by Dubai in Ramaḍān 1419/1998. In the same year, the International Sultan Ḥasan Bolkiah Prize on the theme "Biographies of Islamic Thinkers" was conferred on him by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. He also received the Sultan of Brunei Award in Islamic History.

These awards and honors did not distract the shaykh from a lifetime of self-discipline, nor did the fame and wealth they brought corrupt him. He donated all the money to *masjids*, institutes of Islamic learning, and other charitable causes. Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī writes, "Not a single cent from these prizes stayed in his pocket. Instead, he spent them all for the cause of Allāh Most High."

For me personally, there are certain things that stand out in particular about Shaykh Nadwī. There are many prolific writers who have left behind a large literary legacy. However, there are few whose books are studied regularly by thousands. I recall that for the first four years of our *ʿālimiyya* studies, his

books formed a core part of the curriculum. In the first two years, his Arabic reader series, *Qiṣaṣ al-Nabiyyīn*, was taught, and in the third and fourth years, his literature anthology, the *Mukhtārāt*,[1] was studied. Thousands of students in training around the world study these books, as well as another series by him called *Al-Qirā'a al-Rāshida*. These books have scarcely been outdone as textbooks for foreign students of Arabic. This is without doubt a sign of divine acceptance which few writers enjoy.

It was also the example of Mawlānā Nadwī that one of my teachers at Dār al-ʿUlūm Falāḥ-i Dārayn in Tadkeshwar, Gujarat, India, put forward as he encouraged me take up writing. Mawlānā Iqbāl Dewlawī, a teacher of Arabic literature, and then principal of the seminary, would sometimes meet me in the beautifully landscaped pathways of the seminary, and would stop to speak to me. Students were generally frightened of him, as he had a reputation for strictness. But for some reason, he had taken a liking to me. He encouraged me to write, saying that Shaykh Nadwī, regardless of where he happened to be, whether at home or travelling, would spend a few hours each day putting pen to paper, and that I should adopt the same routine. It may have been his foresight and prayers that paid off for me, as I starting writing my commentary on Shaykh ʿĀshiq Ilāhī's *Zād al-Ṭālibīn* ḥadīth collection[2] a year later after transferring to Darul Uloom Bury in the UK. May Allāh bless him abundantly and grant him a goodly reward for his encouragement.

Several years later, in 1999, while I was back in India for the *muftī* training course at Saharanpur, we heard that Shaykh Nadwī's health was deteriorating. I decided to take the nine-hour train ride from Saharanpur to Lucknow in Eastern UP to visit him and acquire his authorization in ḥadīth. It was a busy time, and it was difficult to book a sleeper in the overnight train from Saharanpur, and I only had two days to return before classes resumed. I was advised to board one of the overnight trains with a general ticket and then speak to the ticket master in order to upgrade it to a sleeper for an additional charge. Following this advice, I set off with my wife and son Huzayfah, who was just over a year old at the time. The ticket master was only able to secure one berth for us. I placed my wife and son on it and laid a sheet on the floor for myself in between the six berths in the compartment. This is something I

1 *Qiṣaṣ al-Nabiyyīn* is a five-volume collection of stories of the prophets, arranged in increasing difficulty of language, to help students read and practice Arabic. *Mukhtārāt min Adab al-ʿArab* is a two-volume anthology of some of the great selections of Arabic literature from its greatest literary masters.

2 Published as, *Provisions for the Seekers*, White Thread Press, 2005.

could probably never do again, but at the time, despite the constraints, it did not prove difficult due to the longing I had to meet the shaykh. If a person has a similar longing for Allāh, life in this world becomes easy to navigate and its hurdles easier to overcome. May Allāh grant us the gift of His friendship and love.

When we reached Lucknow, I stayed at the men's guesthouse, while my wife and son stayed at the residence of Mawlānā ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Bhatkalī, a teacher at the seminary, whose family graciously hosted her. Shaykh Nadwī was informed of my arrival and of my request to acquire his ḥadīth transmission. He gave me an appointment to come the following morning at 10 am. The same evening after ʿaṣr, he sat outside with some other scholars for an informal discussion. I recall them discussing his book, mentioned earlier, *Mā-dhā Khasir al-ʿĀlam*. After spending the night in anticipation, I was taken the next morning to an adjacent building, where I found the shaykh sitting on a bed in the middle of a large room deeply engrossed in his daily remembrance. I sat and waited while he continued with his litany well past 10 am. When someone went to remind him, he gestured that he be given more time. I could see that he was fully absorbed in his remembrance and I felt guilty that perhaps I was disturbing his intimate connection with the Divine. I desired that one day I too be bestowed with the same enjoyment in my remembrance. The scene has been permanently etched in my heart and mind ever since. Eventually, he invited me into the room and asked where I had studied and what I was currently doing. Satisfied with my responses, he asked me to read from a paper that had on it the opening narrations of the nine main books of ḥadīth. After reading them to him he granted me his authorization. I thanked him and departed. I realized a few months later when the news of his death reached me how fortunate I had been to visit him and receive his authorization when I did. All praise is to Allāh.

This monumental scholar passed away at the age of eighty-six on Friday 22 Ramaḍān 1420. He awoke at 9 am, completed his daily litany, recited Sūra Yāsīn thirteen or fourteen times, as was his habit, and supplicated for certain people by name. He took a bath after 11 am, changed his clothes, and prepared himself for the Friday prayer. He asked for a copy of the Qur'ān to recite Sūrat al-Kahf. While waiting, he began to recite Yāsīn again from memory. He had not yet completed the recitation when his soul departed to its Lord. The time was 11:50 am just before the Friday prayer. It was 31 December 1999, the last day of the second Gregorian millennium.

His nephew Shaykh Muḥammad Rābiʿ al-Ḥasanī Nadwī led the funeral

prayer at 10:15 pm that night, now the 23rd night of Ramaḍān, in a congregation whose size was estimated at 200,000. People came from far and wide. He was laid to rest in his family graveyard.

In recent years, there has probably been no other Islamic personality whose funeral prayer has been performed in such large numbers around the world, and fewer still whose funeral prayer has been performed in absentia in the two Holy Sanctuaries. During the blessed night of 27 Ramaḍān, 2,700,000 worshippers performed funeral prayer for him in absentia in the Holy Mosque in Makka Mukarrama, and 1,500,000 worshippers in the Prophet's Mosque in Madīna Munawwara. A group of leading scholars at Azhar University in Cairo issued a communiqué about him on 29 Ramaḍān praising him as a reviver of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, the founder of an Islamic awakening with a balanced approach, and the foremost Islamic scholar from among the scholars of Islam in the sight of God.

This universal acclaim is by no means ordinary. It is enjoyed by the few divinely chosen friends of Allāh who have led scrupulous lives. The shaykh himself used to say, "My mother's entire focus was on keeping even the doubtful from entering my stomach during my childhood." The fruits of this were now being harvested.

Shaykh Nadwī was a man who personified the Islamic values he so fervently wrote about. He was soft-spoken, cultured and courteous, yet bold, confident, and eloquent in proclaiming the truth. Balance, humility, modesty, patience, moderation, and tolerance marked his personality. He was neither politician, nor publicist. He was a man of religion. A scholar of God. A spiritual sage. A modern dervish. One who combined in himself the highest values of the *sharīʿa* (sacred law) and the *ṭarīqa* (spiritual path), commanded respect for his transparent sincerity, his simple living, and his selfless devotion to the common cause of the Muslim community, as well as humanity at large. He was a man who lived for Allāh alone and who wanted nothing but good for all. There was no doubt that he had followed closely in the footsteps of the very saviours about whom he so adoringly wrote. His passing created a void seemingly impossible to fill. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

THE TRANSLATION: Muhiuddin Ahmad's English translation was produced in 1971 from the 1955 Urdu original. By 1986, the English translation had already been published four times and has since been republished multiple times,

inspiring countless people over the decades.[1] However, the somewhat archaic English has made it difficult for readers of a new generation to appreciate. The choice of words and expressions can read awkwardly today and dilute the timeless message of the book.

After securing permission from the publisher, our work on a revised English edition commenced about a decade ago. However, due to many other projects and unforeseen circumstances, it has taken years for us to complete this revision. Other than modernizing the language, I have tried to revise many of its sections. Upon comparison with the original, I found that in numerous places the translator had paraphrased and sometimes even summarized the author's words, often losing important nuances carried in the original text. The translator states in the preface that the author approved his translation after reading it. However, there are also other errors that have found their way into the work, most likely due to the translator's misunderstanding of certain names, dates, or other such details quoted in the original. In a few cases, some names had been inaccurately rendered in the original. Overall, for the time it was written, the translation was lucid and effective in conveying the essence without omitting anything significant.

Therefore, my own contribution has been to revise and reinstate much of the omitted detail, bringing it back in line with the original. I hope I have succeeded to some extent and pray that it is something the author would have approved of himself. The text has been fully edited to reflect a more current English usage. In this regard, I would like to express my gratitude to Brooke Santos, Saad Ansari, and Amir Toft, each of whom labored intensively with their editing skills to provide modern equivalents to the outdated language.

Time constraints have unfortunately forced us to make the difficult decision of leaving out the author's lengthy narrative of the great sage Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī from this volume. This may be included in a future edition of this volume or in an edition of the remaining volumes of the author's original work.

For the Urdu original, we used the fourth Karachi Majlis Nashriyāt-i Islām edition and the 1986 Lucknow Academy of Islamic Research edition for the English. To facilitate a better historical perspective, all dates have been provided in both the Gregorian and Hijrī equivalents. We have tried to verify all quoted material from its original source. Although most notes are from either the author or translator, a number have been added. All place names with known English forms have been given as such, while more obscure ones

1 Along with ten editions of the Arabic translation, and two in both Persian and Turkish.

are transliterated in from their Arabic forms. Sometimes it was difficult to decide on using the old name in place of the modern name, so both have been given in the first instance. The citations and the bibliography have been updated to correspond with modern publishing style. Most works the author consulted were out-of-print editions from the early twentieth century, which have been left as they are. Where a source is omitted from the bibliography, we include a recent edition with date and mark it with a star symbol (*). In very few cases, paragraphs have been rearranged for better flow. All transliteration has been adjusted according to the White Thread Press house style unless it is a direct quote from an English source. Qur'ānic references have been added inline in brackets. Finally, a fresh index has been prepared for this edition with the help of my daughter.

I pray that Allāh make this work a source of guidance in these times and beyond. May He accept it from the author and all those who have worked on it and make it a source of salvation for us in the Hereafter.

Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera
Shaʿbān 1436 | May 2015
London

Preface

A STUDY CIRCLE, FORMED under the name of Jamāʿat-i Daʿwat wa Tablīgh, organized a series of lectures at Lucknow in Muḥarram 1372/1952 on certain topics of concern to its members and others interested in academic and cultural advancement. The topic allotted to me for discourse was "The History of Religious Preaching and the Revivalist Movement." The discourse continued throughout the week. I had then jotted down some points as an aide-mémoire for delivering these lectures, but some of the listeners took down notes which were later presented to me for the purpose of publication. I then realized that the subject required a detailed treatment, as, in my limited knowledge, no exhaustive and complete dissertation existed on this important topic within the discipline of Islamic history. It represented a serious gap in Islamic literature that had to be filled. The absence of any work on this subject has produced the misconception, even in enlightened circles, that attempts for renovation and renaissance of the Muslim peoples were made from time to time, but that no continuous attempt at rejuvenating the Umma could be found in the annals of Islamic history. It is assumed that there are long gaps that span centuries after which a towering personality or two may be found who possessed a striking capacity to struggle against the order of the day. Otherwise what you find are average people who do not rise above the decadence of the times, not people of high caliber who have any intellectual or academic contribution to their credit. Hence, it is assumed that only seven or eight outstanding personalities have been an exception to the barren and unproductive era of Islamic intellectual history.

This notion may not appear to be particularly remarkable, but its consequences are far-reaching. It produces a sense of despondency and a sickening atmosphere. It dashes all hope in the innate vitality of Islam, which has always produced such men of redoubtable courage and conviction as can

hardly be found among other peoples. There are absolutely no grounds, at least not on this score, for such feelings of inferiority and despondency about the history of Islam.

These feelings, however, are not without traceable cause. We find in the vast treasure of Islamic literature either chronicles of events with kings and emperors as protagonists or biographical accounts of a certain few eminent luminaries. But we find almost no continuous account of the revivalist movements or intellectual history of the Muslim peoples encompassing the varied achievements of all those sages who have left an indelible mark on the world of Islam. These scholars relentlessly fought against the forces of corruption, defended Islamic precepts and teachings, and rejuvenated the spirit of Islamic revival, in addition to making valuable contributions to the intellectual and academic treasures of their people. There is in fact no gap at all in the intellectual history of Muslim peoples, but only in the presentation and arrangement of this; this gap needs urgently to be filled in. A history of religious revival and preaching in Islam would also be an account of the intellectual and academic movements that have seen successive ebbs and flows, going dormant for a while before awakening anew.

However, when taking up the task, one realized that an article or a small treatise will not do justice to the subject. The subject requires a large volume. It would be necessary to wade through the historical literature again in detail along with the available works on biography, heresiography, and arts and sciences, and to reevaluate them for this task and present the material in an appropriate arrangement. A cursory review does not suffice. The leisure required for undertaking a task of this magnitude has never been available to me, but as the crying need for such a volume impelled me to take up the work, my disposition prevented me from writing these pages with just a superficial survey of the available material.

It should be made clear that my purpose is neither to explain what is meant by revival (*tajdīd*) nor to name the outstanding personalities who are commonly known as revivalists (*mujaddidīn*). My aim is to present an account of the continuous effort made during the past thirteen hundred years to stimulate a spirit of reawakening among Muslims, and to bring to light those eminent people who rose to the defense of Islam in order to repel the assault of evil forces, who gave birth to various movements for upholding Islamic morals and values, and, finally, whose efforts made it possible for Islam to survive to this day. I mention several persons in this work who cannot perhaps be called *mujaddids*, but who worked for the renovation

and regeneration of Islamic faith and practice, and to whom the subsequent generations of Muslims are ever indebted.

In writing this and subsequent volumes the following points have been kept in view:

1. For presenting the viewpoint of any particular person or a movement started by him, his own writings or sayings have been relied upon. Only if these have been found inadequate has help been taken from the writings left by his friends, contemporaries, and pupils. Thereafter, the most reliable and authentic of the later sources have been given preference without placing undue reliance on sources from any particular century or language. Useful material has been taken wherever it could be found, and cited accordingly.

2. In portraying the biographical sketches and character of the personalities mentioned, light has been shed on the intellectual, cultural, and academic temperament of the time, in order to make a correct assessment of the achievement of the personage concerned in its true perspective. It is necessary to cast a glance on the prevailing situation before a place can be assigned to any individual in history. Assessment of any character stripped of its own context of time and place, and instead according to modern values alone, might have the appearance of critical study, but there can hardly be anything more unjust to the personage so evaluated. The success or failure of any individual of the past can only be judged against the background of the conditions under which he strove for a cause; otherwise, the greatest and most eminent person can be seen as a complete failure in light of changed circumstances or according to the biases and predilections of later historians. In fact, no historical figure, Islamic or otherwise, can claim lasting recognition if viewed from such an angle.

3. Presentation of a few short and sketchy extracts from the writings of any author or thinker hardly does any justice to them; for the thought, intellect, message, and call of the individual cannot be gauged from a few isolated passages, nor can the reader build any intimacy or familiarity with him. Accordingly, somewhat lengthy extracts from the writings of important writers, reformers, and thinkers are frequently presented. You may then yourself be in a position to feel the impact of their message and make your own estimation of each figure. I have spent considerable time going through the writings of these masters to gain a sense of the tenor and spirit of their call. During the days of introducing and describing their lives, I have tried to immerse my self constantly in an environment of reflection about them to allow their effects and states to permeate me, as would have been experienced

by their companions and contemporaries. Consequently, the reader can easily discern from these pages my own heartfelt attitude toward these beacons of moral and spiritual guidance, and may also notice small influences of their language on the style of my own composition. If this is to be taken as a point of weakness in this work and come under fire from critics who hold that the historian should be dryly objective and without heart, then I confess my weakness but nevertheless feel no need to offer any apology.

4. I have not simply given extracts from the works of these masters but also tried to shed light on the priceless qualities of their minds and hearts, their endeavors to cultivate a living, all-pervading consciousness of the Almighty, as well as their moral excellence. The combination of the academic attainments with a burning desire to worship Allāh and earn His pleasure is the mark and symbol of these teachers of yore. This is what has played a major part in their success and divine acceptance. Without its mention their description would be incomplete. Furthermore, it will be an unspoken yet, I believe, rightful desire of many readers of this work—and consequently one that I have tried subtly to facilitate in its pages—to experience some illumination of spirit and heart in addition to simply gaining acquaintance with men of the past.

5. The biographical sketches in these pages are not limited to a presentation of their achievements alone. Wherever contemporaries or subsequent writers have criticized their ideas or writings, a representative portion of such critiques has been presented. If an answer to such criticisms has been given or a defense put up, this too has been included. However, statements deemed too superficial, intemperate, or overly detractive have not been included.

This is the first volume of this series. I originally had a mind to include the achievements of Ibn Taymiyya in this volume as well, and thus finish it with an account of the first eight centuries after the Hijra. But the biography of Ibn Taymiyya, due to the importance of his time and his extensive efforts, ran very long, and it had to be accommodated in a separate volume, which is the second part of this series. The third and most probably the fourth parts of the series will be devoted to the callers and resolute personalities of India, who have been a fount for calling to religion and renovation of Islamic thought in the recent centuries.

Lastly, I have no hesitation in acknowledging that the leisure, peace of mind, in-depth and extensive study, and knowledge of multifarious sciences required for undertaking a task of this magnitude have barely been available to me. Nevertheless, whatever was possible to do in that time and state is now

before the reader. Even this, such as it is, could not have been accomplished without the help and guidance from Allāh Almighty. There is no help save from Allāh alone (Q 3:126).

ABŪ 'L-ḤASAN ʿALĪ NADWĪ
4 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1374
[10 October 1954]
Dā'ira Shāh ʿAlamullāh
Rae Bareli

CHAPTER 1

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz

Revival Efforts of the First Century

Almost immediately after the Rightly-Guided Caliphate ended, there was an intense need for revival and renewal in Islam. This was the era of the Umayyad Empire, which was more Arab than Islamic in character. The customs and memories of the pagan past which had been discredited and diminished under the impact of the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and the vigilant eye of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, gradually began to reassert themselves among the new Arab converts to Islam. The present government no longer functioned according to the principles of the Qur'ān and Sunna, but were guided rather by Arab tribesmanship, expediency, and state interest. Racial pride, tribal favoritism, and partisanship, once regarded as reprehensible traits during the Rightly-Guided Caliphate, were now hallmarks of the new rulership. Extravagance, arrogance, and ostentation replaced virtuous deeds and moral excellence.[1] The caliphs considered the state treasury their personal property and wasted their people's money on court poets, eulogists, jugglers, and clowns. The courtiers of the rulers received preferential treatment, emboldening them to transgress the laws of the land.[2] Music and singing grew into a craze.

1 Abu 'l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī illustrates this in his book *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, in which he relates how two Arab chiefs of the Umayyad period, Ḥawshab and ʿIkrima, vied to outdo each other over the quantity of food they required to feed their households and guests. When it seemed that Ḥawshab was likely to win in the contest, ʿIkrima bought several hundred bags of flour, distributed it among his tribesmen for kneading. He asked them to pile up the dough in a pit, which was covered with grass. Then he managed to get Ḥawshab's horse pass over the pit. When the poor beast fell into the pit, only its neck and head were visible above the dough. ʿIkrima's fame soon spread far and wide because of the quantity of flour required to feed his tribe, and many poets sang of his greatness (Iṣbahānī, *Rannāt al-Mathālith*, 1:139–140).

2 On one occasion, the famous Christian poet Akhṭal (d. 59/701) came into the court of Caliph

The extravagant rulers, surrounded by corrupt leeches who flocked to the capital, demoralized society and produced an aristocracy resembling the pagan Arab hedonists of the Age of Ignorance.[1] It appeared as if pre-Islamic ignorance had returned with a vengeance to settle its account with the previous forty years of Islamic civilization.

Religious Teachers of the Umayyad Period

Although crass materialism had captured the soul of the Umayyad ruling elite, the common people had not forsaken their moral values and their deep reverence for the teachings of Islam. This was thanks mainly to a group of unimpeachable scholars held in high esteem for their moral and spiritual excellence, selflessness, piety, wisdom, and charity. Outside the circle of the Umayyad government, these scholars exerted a tremendous corrective influence on the people and saved the general society from falling prey to the allure of worldly temptations. The person most respected and loved during this period was ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn). In the simple, pure, and righteous manner in which he lived his life, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn had no peer.

On one occasion, the crown prince Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik came to the Kaʿba to perform circumambulation (*ṭawāf*), but he was held back by the gathering of a huge crowd. He decided to sit down and wait for an opportunity to kiss the Black Stone. In the meantime, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn arrived at the Kaʿba and the people immediately cleared the way for him to make his way around the Kaʿba and kiss the Black Stone. Everyone present at the Kaʿba treated ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn with the utmost respect. Finally, Hishām, pretending not to know ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, asked who he was. The poet Farazdaq, who happened to be present on the occasion, instantly composed an ode introducing ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn. It is reported that certain additions were made to this famous ode later on, but it is still regarded as a masterpiece of Arabic poetry. It opens with the following verse:

Pebbles and paths of Makka affirm his virtue;
The House of Allāh knows him well as the environs do.[2]

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān stone drunk, wine dripping from his beard and a cross hung over his chest, but not one person had the courage to complain against him (Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 7:177–178).

1 A famous singer of Iraq named Ḥunayn once visited Madīna along with his party. Such a large crowd gathered to hear his performance that the roof of the house in which he was singing collapsed. Ḥunayn himself died from injuries he sustained in the accident (Ibid., 2:122–123).

2 For a detailed description, see Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ*, 1:46, 53, 77, 84; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, 2:44, 47, 49, 50.

Other highly regarded religious scholars of outstanding piety during the Umayyad period included Ḥasan al-Muthannā, his son ʿAbdullāh al-Maḥḍ, Sālim ibn ʿAbdillāh ibn ʿUmar, Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, and ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr. They distinguished themselves as models of Islamic piety with their complete detachment from the rulers, their immaculate selflessness, their unswerving truthfulness and scholarly acumen, and their readiness to serve and make any sacrifice for their religion. The moral degradation that sprung from the depraved conduct of the ruling class was on the rise, but the opposing positive influence of these great individuals on the broader society still yielded positive effect. Their pure and simple lifestyle was a living admonishment to the unrestrained worldliness of the rulers, encouraging people to reform their intemperate lives.

Political Revolution

The corruption of political leaders gradually deepened and spread. Simultaneously, religious teachers who could lead the people towards goodness as in the earlier period significantly decreased. Now it actually became impossible to morally revitalize society without a transformation from within the caliphate itself. The Umayyad dynasty, however, was militarily entrenched, rendering their expulsion impossible. Consequently, no internal or external force would dare challenge it. Two efforts by Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Zubayr ﷺ to overthrow the Umayyads had already proved unsuccessful, and one could hardly expect another armed rebellion to bring about a political reform. The autocratic, hereditary form of government produced a sense of despair that left no hope of any change in the condition of the Islamic state. It appeared as if the fate of Muslims had been sealed for ages to come. Apparently, it would take nothing short of a miracle to reform the empire so that the guiding light of Islam once would again become the basis directing the community's behavior. Fortunately, a miracle did happen.

Accession of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz

This miracle was the accession of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to the throne in 99/717. Through his father he was a grandson of Marwān. For her part, his mother, Umm ʿĀṣim, was a granddaughter of the second caliph of Islam, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Fārūq ﷺ.[1] The Umayyad and Farūqī families were

1 Once, while wandering about at night to inquire into the condition of the people, Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ﷺ heard a woman instructing her daughter to mix water into the milk before

thus jointly represented in ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, later known as the "Pious Caliph" who brought about the direly needed revolution.

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was born in 61/681. He was a cousin of the preceding caliph, Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, and had been posted as governor of Madīna since the time of Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, Sulaymān's predecessor. The life he led as governor was entirely different from the one he was to adopt as caliph. He was known as a polished and decorous aristocrat of refined taste. Anybody could tell from the scent of fragrances he would wear that ʿUmar had not long since passed that way. He was all the rage for the fashionable young men of his day. Except for his integrity of character and righteous disposition, there was nothing to suggest that he was destined to serve a memorable role in the history of Islam. But he would prove to be a standing miracle for that history.

The very way he ascended to the caliphate was miraculous, for nobody could have predicted the dramatic turn of events that would bring him to the throne. Under the custom of hereditary succession, he had little hope of ever becoming much more than a viceroy, let alone caliph. But Allāh Almighty had willed otherwise. Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik became so ill that he finally lost hope of recovery. He called for his sons, desperately wanting to leave his title to one of them, but they were all much too young. In desperation, Sulaymān dressed each of them in longer garments, large uniforms, and suits of armor to make them appear older, but to no avail. Finally, resigning himself to defeat, he sighed, "He is really fortunate who has adult sons." Rajā' ibn Ḥaywa, one of the caliphs's advisors, happened to be present and suggested Sulaymān's cousin ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz as a good choice to succeed the caliph. Sulaymān saw the wisdom of choosing ʿUmar as a successor and unknowingly opened the way for the first major period of Islamic revival since the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.

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daybreak. The girl refused and reminded her mother of the order given by Caliph ʿUmar that nobody should adulterate milk by mixing water into it. When the mother responded in annoyance that the caliph was not present and he would never know about it, the daughter replied that Allāh is All-Knowing, even if the caliph is not present. ʿUmar ﷺ was so pleased with the daughter's reply that he asked his son ʿĀṣim to marry her, and expressed a hope that she would give birth to a man who would rule over Arabia. ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was the son of the daughter of ʿĀṣim by that girl (Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 17–18).

Character of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz

As stated earlier, the life ʿUmar led before was entirely different from his life as caliph. Except for his integrity and righteous disposition, there was nothing about him to suggest that he was destined to perform anything remarkable for the history of Islam. Ascension to the caliphate, however, completely changed him, as he saw himself as a successor of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb rather than a successor of Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.

Of ʿUmar's first acts as caliph were to immediately dismiss all the provincial governors who were known to be cruel, oppressive, or unjust to their people, to set free the slaves in the royal household, and to deposit into the state treasury (*bayt al-māl*) all the jewels and valuable goods that he received as gifts when he became caliph. He returned to the state not only his ancestral estate but also the valuables and jewelry his wife had received from her father and brothers.

Before his time, the court of the caliphate had been modeled after the royal courts of the Persian and Byzantine empires, the most powerful and extravagant of the day. In contrast, the court of ʿUmar more closely resembled that of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ and his earliest Companions and Successors. Indeed, his court became well known not for its lavishness, but for its stark simplicity. He led a simple and ascetic life difficult to find among dervishes and monks, let alone kings and emperors. On several occasions he was even late for Friday prayers because he had to wait for the only shirt he owned to dry after it had been washed.

Before ʿUmar ascended the throne, the caliphs used to regard the public treasury as their own personal property to do with as they pleased, and their extended families often enjoyed enormous stipends. They now only received what was their due. ʿUmar refused to use even a single dirham of the state's money. One day, when he was talking to his daughters, he noticed that the children cupped their mouths when they spoke. When he asked about it, he learned that the only foods available in the house that day were onions and lentils, so the children resorted to covering their mouths with their hands so the smell of their breath would not offend their father. With tears in his eyes, ʿUmar said to them, "My children, would you like to enjoy a variety of sumptuous foods and have your father consigned to Hellfire?" Upon hearing this, they also burst into tears.[1]

He was the ruler of the mightiest empire of his day but despite his desire

1 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 55.

to perform the ḥajj (pilgrimage), did not have enough money for it. Once, he asked his servant if he had saved anything so that he could go for the ḥajj. The servant informed him that he had only ten or twelve dinars, not nearly enough to undertake the journey. After a few days, ʿUmar received a certain sum from his personal holdings. The servant congratulated ʿUmar, as he now had enough money for the ḥajj. ʿUmar replied, "We have derived benefit from these holdings for a long time. Now, Muslims have a right to enjoy their fruits." Then he brought the entire amount and deposited it in the public treasury.

ʿUmar never spent more than two dirhams on his meals. If any official came to see him and began private conversation, he would promptly put out the candle provided by the state and ask for his own candle to be brought in. He would never use hot water taken from the state cafeteria or even inhale the fragrance of musk belonging to the public treasury.[1]

ʿUmar wasn't scrupulous in his own person alone, he also demanded that government officials be extremely conscientious with their use of state property. Abū Bakr ibn Ḥazm, the governor of Madīna, once submitted a request to former caliph Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, asking for candlesticks and lamp glass to perform official work after dark. By the time the request reached the capital, Sulaymān had died and the request was placed before ʿUmar. He responded to it by writing, "O Abū Bakr, I remember the days when you wandered during the dark nights of winter without candlesticks and light. And were you in a better condition then than now? I hope that you now have enough candlesticks to spare a few for conducting the business of the state."[2] On another occasion he received a similar request for a supply of paper for official work. He replied, "Make the point of your pen finer, write closely and concisely; for Muslims do not require such detailed reports that are unnecessarily a burden on the state treasury."[3]

Extreme scrupulousness, moderation, simplicity, and unwavering piety were not the only features of ʿUmar's court. He completely transformed the government's trajectory, making the needs of the people a key focus. Before ʿUmar's time, the state was mainly concerned with collecting money and spending it, and did not bother itself with the moral guidance and religious instruction of its people. ʿUmar's philosophy about the role of the state can be summed up in his famous saying, "Muḥammad ﷺ was sent as a Prophet

1 Ibid., 44.
2 Ibid., 64.
3 Ibid.

and not as a collector."[1] He ardently devoted the entire period of his caliphate to translating this ideal into practice.

Though an effective statesman, ʿUmar always preferred principles, moral dictates, and the demands of the faith to political success, and he thought nothing of financial loss suffered by the state if it meant more closely following a policy commended by the religion. During his reign people were embracing Islam in ever-increasing numbers, which meant a sharp decrease in income from the protection-tax applied to non-Muslims. This drop in revenue was brought to ʿUmar's attention, since it posed a danger to the financial stability of the state. His response was that this situation was exactly in accord with the aims of the prophecy of Muḥammad ﷺ To one official, he wrote, "I would be all too glad if all the non-Muslims embraced Islam and (owing to the drying up of income from protection-tax) we had to take up cultivation to earn our living."[2]

In another case, a fixed amount of land revenue was supposed to be given by the provincial government of Yemen every year, regardless of whether or not there was a favorable crop. ʿUmar ordered that these revenues instead be assessed yearly based on yield. He added that he would willingly accept it even if the fulfillment of his command meant that only a handful of grain was collected.[3] He discontinued tariffs imposed on goods entering a city throughout the kingdom saying that it was prohibited by the following verse of the Qur'ān:

> O my people! Give full measure and full weight with justice, and wrong not people in respect of their goods. And do not do evil in the earth, causing corruption. (Q 11:85)

ʿUmar used to say that people have made such trade tariffs lawful by calling it by another name.[4] Aside from the few taxes allowed by the Sharīʿa, he abolished all the other taxes and duties imposed by his predecessors.[5] All land and sea routes were opened for trade without any restriction whatsoever.[6]

Far-reaching technical reforms were introduced in the administration as well. Weights and measures were standardized to facilitate trade, state

1 Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, 75.
2 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib Ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 64.
3 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 26.
4 Ibid., 99.
5 Ibid., 99.
6 Ibid., 93.

officials were barred from entering into any business,[1] and unpaid labor was outlawed.[2] Pasture lands and game preserves reserved for the royal family and other nobility were distributed to the landless cultivators or made into public property.[3] Strict measures were taken to stop illegal bribery, and state employees were forbidden from accepting gifts.[4] All officers holding important posts were ordered to provide adequate means for anyone who wanted to present a complaint to them in person. In addition, a proclamation was made every year on the occasion of the ḥajj that anyone who brought notice to the administration of any mistreatment by a state official, or who offered a useful suggestion, would be rewarded 100 to 300 dinars.[5]

Solicitude for Moral Reformation

After the Rightly-Guided Caliphate came to an end, the caliphs began to regard themselves as monarchs and administrators. They were neither capable of, nor did they have the time to bother about, the moral and social conditions of their people. It was not even expected that the caliphs advise people in religious affairs, invest in the moral, religious, or spiritual advancement of the Umma, or deliver sermons. This was considered to be the domain of religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) and ḥadīth scholars. ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz did away with this separation and proved himself to a true successor of the Prophet, as his office implied.

Immediately upon assuming the position of caliph, ʿUmar sent out lengthy letters and directives to his subordinates. His letters dealt more with religious and moral reforms than with ostensible administrative affairs; he compared the social and moral condition of the people in his time with the early days of the Prophet ﷺ and the caliphs, and focus on the financial and administrative systems needed to bring about an Islamic renewal.[6] He also admonished his governors and generals about the importance of timely performance of their prayers and of leading the congregational prayers.[7] He urged public servants to instill the awe of Allāh in the people and meticulously follow the regulations of the Sharīʿa.[8] In addition, he charged his officers with the responsibility of

1 Ibid., 99.
2 Ibid., 100.
3 Ibid., 97.
4 Ibid., 162.
5 Ibid., 141.
6 Ibid., 69
7 Ibid., 79.
8 Ibid., 92.

spreading the message of Islam in their provinces, as he considered this to be the sole objective of the divine revelation and the prophecy of Muḥammad ﷺ.

He insisted on enjoining the mandatory and preventing the forbidden, and warned his deputies about the risk of neglecting this.[1] He elaborated the criminal law of Islam and instructed the courts to be lenient in assigning punishments.[2] He drew attention to deviations and negative innovations born of foreign customs and traditions that had found their way into daily life. For example, he forbade lamentation over the dead and put a stop to a custom requiring women to accompany funeral processions, as well as their unnecessary appearance in public.[3] He put down tribal partisanship[4] and ended leniency toward *nabīdh*,[5] which had led to drinking alcohol and countless other vices.[6]

Compilation of Ḥadīths

The study and cultivation of religious sciences attracted significant attention from ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. He wrote to Abū Bakr ibn Ḥazm, an eminent scholar of his time, "Commit into writing whatever ḥadīths of the Prophet ﷺ you can collect, for I fear that after the scholars of ḥadīth pass away, the knowledge will also perish."[7] He made a specific reference to the collections of ʿAmra bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Anṣāriyya and Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, which he wanted to have recorded. The task was not entrusted to Abū Bakr ibn Ḥazm alone: circulars were issued to provincial governors and other notable scholars, commanding them to "collect all the ḥadīths of the Prophet of Islam ﷺ wherever they are to be found." At the same time, ʿUmar also granted stipends to those who were entrusted with this task so they would have the means to pursue the job wholeheartedly.[8]

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was a man of learning in his own right. He took a keen interest in the interpretation of ḥadīth and Islamic law. In the beginning of his caliphate he circulated an edict that said:

1 Ibid., 167.

2 Ibid., 80–81.

3 Ibid., 108.

4 Ibid.

5 *Nabīdh* is a drink traditionally made from fruits such as raisins or dates by soaking them in water for several hours. It is generally not intoxicating but can become mildly or heavily so depending on the level of fermentation.

6 Ibid., 102.

7 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1:20.

8 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 167.

> Islam has laid down certain limits, duties, and obligations. Whoever follows these shall be rewarded by complete faith, but those who do not, their faith shall remain imperfect. If Allāh keeps me alive, I will teach you the fundamentals of faith and make you follow them, but if I die sooner, I won't care, for I am not at all eager to remain among you.[1]

Defender of Faith

The pure Islamic thought and spirit that ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz strove to instill in the Muslims, and which he gave a practical manifestation through the state he ruled over, can be seen in the letters and proclamations he issued to the various officials in his government, showing that he held a deep understanding of Islam without the slightest trace of pre-Islamic ignorance or the stamp of Umayyad royalty.

It was once reported to him that certain tribal chiefs and Umayyad aristocrats had revived the pagan custom of entering into tribal alliances.[2] They had been calling on one another in the name of tribal solidarity to assist each other in their fight and forays. This custom cut at the very root of the Islamic concept of brotherhood. Earlier rulers would have looked the other way or even encouraged the practice as a political expedient, but ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, being fully aware of the dangerous implications of the practice, issued an order to Ḍaḥḥāk ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān to suppress this evil custom. In it he wrote:

> Praise be to Allāh and peace unto His Apostle. Thereafter you should know that Allāh does not like any religion other than Islam, which he has chosen for Himself and His bondsmen. Allāh has been pleased to honor His religion, Islam, with a scripture, which has made Islam distinct from all else. In it He says, "Now has come unto you light from Allāh and a plain scripture, whereby Allāh guides him who seeks His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He brings them out of darkness into light by His decree and guides them unto a straight path" (Q 5:15–16).
>
> Allāh also says: "With truth We have sent it down and with truth has it descended. And We have sent you as nothing else but a bearer of good tidings and a warner" (Q 17:105).
>
> Allāh Almighty bestowed prophecy on Muḥammad ﷺ and revealed the

1 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1:6.

2 A pre-Islamic custom under which two tribes took an oath of fealty to help each other in every eventuality irrespective of the just course of action.

scripture to him. Then, O Arabs, as you know, you lived in ignorance, idolatry, and impurity. You were plunged into poverty, disorder, and chaos. Fights and forays figured largely in your lives; you were looked down upon by others; and whatever little light of Divine Guidance was available to other nations, you were deprived even of that. There was no perversion and depravity which could not be found in your midst. If you lived, yours was a life of ignorance and infidelity, and if you died, you were consigned to Hellfire. At last Allāh saved you from these evils: idolatry and anarchy, hatred and conflict. Although many of you denied and decried the Prophet of Allāh ﷺ he remained steadfast in his endeavor until a few poor people among you responded to his call. Fearing the worst, these men always ran for their lives but Allāh gave them asylum, sent His succor to them, and gave them strength through those whom He chose to enlighten with Islam. The Prophet of Allāh ﷺ was to depart from this world and Allāh had to fulfill the promise made to His messenger. The promise of Allāh never changes, but none save a few of the faithful believed in what Allāh, the Almighty, had promised: "It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the pagans may detest (it)" (Q 9:33).

In another verse, Allāh has promised the Muslims: "Allāh has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will surely grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion, the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me.' If they do reject faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked" (Q 24:55).

Allāh has fulfilled the promise he made to His Prophet and to the Muslims. Therefore, O Muslims, remember that whatever Allāh Almighty, has bestowed on you is solely on account of Islam. You are victorious over your enemies in the world and will be raised as a witness unto others in the Hereafter. But for Islam, you have no refuge in this world, nor after death. You have nothing to fall back upon, no source of strength, no protection, no safeguard. And if you are fortunate enough to see the fulfillment of the promise made by Allāh, you need to pin your hopes in the abode of the Hereafter, since Allāh has said: "That home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who intend not high-handedness or mischief on earth: and the end is (best) for the righteous" (Q 28:83).

I warn you of the disaster that will befall you if you do not act according to the teachings of the Qur'ān. The bloodshed and disorder, turmoil and afflic-

tion to which you had been exposed as a result of disregarding the guidance provided by the scripture, is recent history. You should, therefore, desist from what has been prohibited by Allāh in His scripture; for there is nothing more dreadful than the admonition sounded by Allāh Almighty.

I have been obliged to write this letter on account of the reports reaching me from the countryside about those who have recently been sent there as stewards and administrators. These are an ignorant and unintelligent lot who are not aware of Allāh's commandments. They have forgotten the special favor and benevolence of Allāh over them, or rather they have shown ingratitude for the undeserved favors bestowed upon them. I have been told that they seek the help of the people of Muḍar and Yemen, for they think that these tribes are their allies and partisans. Glorified be Allāh, alone deserving all praise. What an ungrateful and ill-seeming lot these are, and how inclined they are to invite death, destruction, and doom! They have no eyes to see what a despicable position they have chosen for themselves, nor are they aware of how they have deprived themselves of peace and brotherhood. Now I realize that miscreants and ruffians are shaped as such by their own intentions, and also that Hellfire was not created in vain. Have they never heard of the commandment of Allāh Almighty? "The Believers are but a single brotherhood: So make peace between your two brothers; and fear Allāh, that you may receive mercy" (Q 49:10). And have they not heard this verse as well? "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Q 5:3).

I have been told that certain tribes are entering into alliances to help one another against their enemies as they used to do in the bygone days of ignorance, even though the Prophet ﷺ prohibited unconditional alliances for helping one another. The Prophet ﷺ said, "There is no partisanship in Islam." In the times of ignorance, allies expected help from each other in every unjust cause, no matter whether it led to oppression or wrongdoing, transgression of the commands of Allāh or of His Prophet. . . .

I warn everyone who may happen to read my letter or hear its content against taking any shelter except Islam and seeking the protection of anyone except Allāh Almighty and His Prophet. I again warn everyone with all the emphasis at my command and seek to make Allāh my witness against these persons, for He has authority over every being and He is nearer to everyone than their jugular vein."[1]

1 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 104–107.

The directives sent by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to the commander of a military expedition illustrates the extent to which he had absorbed the Qur'ānic perspective and mode of thought, and how completely he differed from the other rulers and emperors of his era. In one of his letters to Manṣūr ibn Ghālib, he wrote:

> This is a directive from the bondsman of Allāh and Commander of the Faithful to Manṣūr ibn Ghālib. Whereas the Commander of the Faithful has charged Manṣūr to wage war against those who might oppose him, (Manṣūr) is also instructed to instill the awe of Allāh, since it constitutes the best of provisions, the most effective strategy, and the only true power. For sin is even more dangerous than the deception of the enemy. The Commander of the Faithful bids Manṣūr, instead of taking fright of his enemy, to fear transgressing the limits of Allāh. We overcome our enemies in the battlefield only because of their vices and sins, for, had it not been so, we would not have had the courage to face them. We cannot deploy troops in the same numbers as our enemies, nor do we possess the equipment they have. Thus, if we match our enemies in misdeed and transgression, they would undoubtedly gain victory over us by virtue of their numerical superiority and strength. Behold, if we were not able to gain victory over our enemies on account of our righteousness, we would never be in a position to defeat them through our own might. More than any enemy, we need not keep an eye on our own sins, and as far as possible we have to be concerned of them. You should realize the fact that Allāh Almighty has assigned wardens over you who never part company with you, and they are aware of whatever you do in your camps and barracks, secretly or openly. Therefore, do not put yourself to shame by exceeding the bounds of Allāh. Be kind to others, especially as you have left hearth and home for the sake of Allāh.
>
> Never consider yourselves superior to your enemies, nor take your victory for granted because of the sinfulness of your foes, for many a people worse than his enemy has been granted dominance in the past. Therefore seek the help of Allāh against your own temptations in the same way you desire the succor of Allāh against your opponent. I would also beseech Allāh's blessings for myself and you.
>
> The Commander of the Faithful also bids Manṣūr ibn Ghālib to treat his men with leniency. He should not require his troops to undertake toilsome journeys, nor refuse to encamp when they require rest. The troops, weakened from exertion and long travel, should not be required to face an enemy whose

troops and beasts are taking rest in their own territory. Hence, if Manṣūr does not accord humane treatment to his men, his enemy will easily gain dominance over his forces. Verily, help can be sought from Allāh alone.

For giving rest to his men and beasts, and also for getting his armaments repaired, the Commander of the Faithful orders Manṣūr ibn Ghālib to break his journey every Friday for the whole day and night. He is also ordered to encamp far away from settlements which have entered into treaties with us, and allow none of his troops to visit their dwellings, markets, or gatherings. Only those of his men who are firm in faith and trustworthy and who would neither be ill-disposed nor commit a sin against the people should be allowed to visit these locales for the collection of lawful dues. You are as much bound to guarantee their rights as they are enjoined to fulfill the duties assigned to them. In other words, you must honor your obligations to them so long as they honor theirs. You should never try to gain an advantage over your enemy through persecution of those who have come under your protection, for you have already got a share in their earnings (in the shape of the *jizya*, or protection-tax) and you need not to increase it, nor they are bound to pay more.

Furthermore, we have neither cut down your provisions nor deprived you of anything required to strengthen you. You have been given charge of our best forces and provided with everything required for the endeavor. Henceforth, you must pay attention to the land of the polytheists, our enemies, and need not concern yourself with those who have come under our protection. After having made the best possible arrangements for you, we place trust with Allāh Almighty: There is no power nor might save from Allāh.

The Commander of the Faithful further directs that you shall appoint only such persons to be your spies, from the Arabs or non-Arabs, in whose honesty and trustworthiness you have confidence, for intelligence received through deceitful persons is hardly of any use. Even if a treacherous fellow passes on to you some correct information, he ought really to be treated as a spy for the enemy. May Allāh grant peace upon you.[1]

In another circular to the provincial governors, he wrote:

Verily, Allāh has entrusted me with the charge of administration. I have not accepted this responsibility for the sake of riches or sensual delights, feasts or fine clothing; Allāh had already favored me with a fortune that only a few can boast of. I fully realize the grave responsibility of this charge. I have taken

1 Ibid., 84–87.

this obligation upon myself with a great deal of anxiety and self-reflection. I know I will be called upon to render the account in the presence of Allāh, when claimants and defendants will both be present to argue their cases on the Day of Judgement—a burdensome day indeed, save for those on whom Allāh showers his mercy and whom He protects from this grievous ordeal.

I bid you be cautious and God-fearing in all affairs of state charge to you, and I ask you to fulfill your obligations, perform what has been ordained by Allāh, and desist from the acts prohibited by the Sharīʿa. You ought to keep an eye upon yourself and your actions. Be cautious of the acts that unite you with Allāh, on the one hand, and with your subjects, on the other. You are aware that salvation and safety lie in complete submission to the Almighty and the ultimate goal of all endeavors should be, by the same token, to make preparations for success on the Appointed Day.

If you will, you might take a lesson from the happenings around you. Only then can I convey the truth to you through my preaching. May Allāh grant peace upon you.[1]

Propagation of Islam

The efforts of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz were not only limited to the enforcement of the Sharīʿa as the law of the land and the reformation of the Muslims. He also devoted his attention to spreading the message of Islam among the non-Muslims. His endeavors were successful due to the example he provided through his own simple life of unaffected piety, unswerving uprightness, and faultless sincerity. Balādhurī writes in *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Conquests of the Lands):

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz wrote seven letters to the rajas in India, inviting them to embrace Islam. He promised that if they did so, he would guarantee the continued existence of their kingdoms and that their rights and obligations would be the same as those of the other Muslims. The name and fame of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had already reached those lands, and when they received ʿUmar's dispatch, they embraced Islam and adopted Arabic names.[2]

Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbdillāh ibn Abī 'l-Mahājir Mawlā Banī Makhzūm, governor of the Maghrib (northwest Africa), administered the land with justice and excelled in his character and morals. He initiated *daʿwa* among the Berber tribes. Thereafter, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz sent a letter inviting those people to

1 Ibid., 92–93.

2 Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 446–447.

> embrace Islam, which was read out loud in huge local gatherings by Ismāʿīl. A large number of people converted to Islam and, at last, Islam became the predominant faith of the land.[1]

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz also wrote letters to the rulers and chiefs of Transoxiana[2] and excused new converts to Islam in Khurasan from the payment of protection-tax. He also granted stipends and rewards to those who embraced Islam and constructed rest houses for travelers.[3]

Financial Reforms

Although ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz initiated a number of financial reforms to put an end to taxes and duties that are forbidden by the Sharīʿa, this did not result in financial troubles or losses in the income of the state. On the contrary, the people became so well-off that it was difficult to find needy people and beggars who would accept the *zakāt*.

Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd relates that ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz appointed him to collect and distribute the *zakāt* in Africa. When he had collected the money, he looked around for the poor and needy people, but he could not find a single individual who needed assistance. He adds that ʿUmar's economic policy had made everybody into men of means and, therefore, he had no alternative but to purchase slaves and then free them on behalf of the Muslim people.[4]

Another man from the Quraysh tribe reported that during the extremely short rule of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, people used to pay enormous sums in *zakāt* to the state treasury for distribution among the poor, but the money had to be returned to them because nobody could be found who was eligible to receive it. He says that everyone had become so well-off during ʿUmar's time that no one was living in the type of difficult circumstances that entitled one to receive the poor due.[5]

Apart from the prosperity of the general public, which is clearly a byproduct of the Islamic form of government rather than the work of the caliph himself, the most important change was the shift in focus and concern of the people. His contemporaries relate that whenever a few friends met during the regime of Walīd, they used to talk about buildings and architecture, since

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1 Ibid., 339

2 Countries in Central Asia to the north of the river Oxus; in Arabic called *Mā Warā'al-Nahr*, lit. "that which lies beyond the river."

3 Ibid., 432

4 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 169.

5 Ibid., 128.

that was the craze in Walīd's time. Sulaymān was fond of women and banquets, so these were the fads of his day. In contrast, during the reign of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the popular pursuit and topic of discussion was optional prayers, obediences, and remembrances. Whenever a few people gathered, they would ask each other about the voluntary prayers offered for acquiring spiritual benefits, the portion of the Qur'ān each had recited or committed to memory, the fasts they observed every month, and so on.[1]

The guiding light of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and the guiding force behind his endeavors was his unflinching faith, his conviction in the Day of Judgement, and his desire for Paradise. Whatever he did was solely on account of his desire to please Allāh Most High, impelling him to lead a life of simplicity, abstinence, and forbearance despite being the ruler of the most powerful and extensive empire in the world. If anyone advised him to raise his standard of living to the level his position called for, he would recite from the Qur'ān: "I fear, if I rebel against my Lord, the retribution of an Awful Day" (Q 6:15).

Once, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said to this servant, "Allāh has favored me with an insatiable and ambitious character: no sooner do I attain an object I longed for than I set my heart upon a still higher objective. Now I have reached a level after which nothing remains to be sought after. Now my ambition aspires for Paradise alone."[2]

On another occasion, he asked counsel from a wise man, who replied, "What would it benefit you if all mankind were sent to Paradise and you consigned to Hellfire? Similarly, what would you lose if you were awarded Paradise and all others sent to Hellfire?" When he heard this, ʿUmar's remorse knew no bounds, and he wept so bitterly that the fire in the dish in front of him was extinguished by his tears.[3] Yazīd ibn Ḥawshab once remarked that it seemed as if Paradise and Hellfire had been created by Allāh only for him and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.[4]

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's Death

If Allāh had only granted ʿUmar the span of rule enjoyed by his predecessors, the whole Islamic world would have witnessed a complete and lasting revolution. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The Umayyads were hit hard by

1 Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa 'l-Mulūk*, 8: 98.

2 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 61.

3 Ibid., 108–109.

4 *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, 3:156.

the reign of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and watched power slipping from their fingers. They openly regretted the day when the families of Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Ibn Umayya had been united through marriage. They could not endure life under ʿUmar any longer, for it was against their essence, and they soon found a means to do away with the most virtuous Muslim of their time. ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz died in the middle of 101/720 after a rule of only two years and five months. There was reason to believe that a slave in the service of the caliph was commissioned by his own family to poison him.[1]

1 *Sīra ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, 118.

CHAPTER 2

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī

Decline of Faith and Rise of Moral Decadence

After the death of Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, there was a complete reversal of the state policy back to the ways of his corrupt predecessors. Pre-Islamic ignorance returned with a vengeance to undo every reform ʿUmar had introduced. His successors, starting with Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (who had been appointed to succeed him by Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik), took full advantage of their power and position to satisfy the demands of their kinsmen.

Hereditary rule, along with the wealth and success of the Umayyads, gave rise to the germs of hypocrisy and the characteristics of extreme extravagance of past nations. Soon the society at large became inclined to worldly indulgence. Pursuit of pleasure and reckless abandon threatened to become the prevailing trend among the general public as well. Moral and spiritual transformation and righteous living stemming from true faith had been the most valuable legacy of the Messenger's ﷺ teachings and a source of vitality for the Umma. But a worldly attitude now threatened to overwhelm the people's warmth of spirit, faith, and awe of Allāh Most High, leading to the failure of spiritual forces and the decline of moral excellence.

It was a moment of great danger for the Umma, and it appeared to be the beginning of the end. The government was disregarding the virtues it should have been promoting, and it blatantly supported and encouraged its representatives to scorn moral decency and righteousness. The self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking ways of the elite were promoting fast-spreading vices like lavish living and sloth. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ had flooded the hearts of his followers with reverence, awe, complete submission, and a living relationship with the Almighty, but these qualities were now on the wane. It was a deficiency that could never be solved through military conquests or by expanding the borders of the empire. History has proven that once a

nation loses its spirit, it can never be regained, and that nation immediately suffers the consequences.

If the vitality and dynamic energy of the Umma had been left unattended to crumble and expire under the social and political forces of deviance, Muslims would have soon become a materialistic and self-indulgent people without any conception of the next life. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ had repeatedly expressed his anxiety near the end of his life that Muslims might be swallowed up by the pleasures of this world as the earlier nations had been. A few days before his death, the Messenger ﷺ warned his Companions of this danger in these words:

> I do not fear for you poverty. What I fear is that the world might be extended to you with all its affluence and luxury as it was to the people before you, and that you might then vie with one another for it as they did, and so be destroyed by it as they were.[1]

Endeavors to Combat Evil

The danger that Allāh's Messenger ﷺ had spoken of was threatening to reveal itself, but its tide was stemmed by a few tireless individuals of unflinching faith and ardent zeal. The sermons and admonitions, the lectures and teachings of these guardians of faith saved millions in the Umma from being swept away by the flood of rank materialism. They maintained the uninterrupted chain of religious and spiritual traditions, teachings, and principals of Islam, which was assuredly much more important than the political supremacy of the Umma. Those who stepped in to fill in the gap at this crucial moment, and thus save the world of Islam from declining into a godless, characterless, and spiritually enfeebled existence were Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn, Shaʿbī, and the forerunner of them all, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

Capabilities of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī

The sage Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was born in 21/642. His father, Yasār, was a freed slave of Zayd ibn Thābit, a celebrated companion of the Prophet ﷺ. Zayd was himself brought up in the household of the Mother of the Believers (*umm al-muʾminīn*), Umm Salama ﷺ. Thus, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī had the benefit of being an associate of the Companions of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ. He had been blessed with the ennobling virtues and brilliant capabilities essential to making his push for Islamic revival and renewal effective in his time. It seems that he was

1 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 7065.

also a keen observer of the events and transformations that contemporary Islamic society was undergoing around him. For he was fully aware of the ills, deficiencies, and maladies that had crept into the different segments of society, as well as the measures necessary to eradicate them.

He was distinguished, on the one hand, by his personality—amicable and considerate, charismatic and enchanting—and, on the other hand, by an intellect and profound learning that were tempered with prudence and wisdom. In knowledge of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, he excelled all the scholars of his time. Rabīʿ ibn Anas said that he had the privilege of being closely associated with Ḥasan al-Baṣrī for ten years, and that almost every day he discovered something new from the man's discourses which he had not heard before.[1] Describing the scholarly attainments of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī quotes Thābit ibn Qurra:

> In his learning and piety, forbearance and self-restraint, sincerity and large-heartedness, wisdom and prudence, he resembled a bright star. He was always surrounded by students seeking instruction in different branches of learning. He would be teaching ḥadīth to one, Qur'ān exegesis to another, jurisprudence to a third, expounding a legal opinion to someone else, and giving instruction in legal methodology to yet another, while continuing his sermons in the meantime for those who came to him for that purpose. His knowledge covered an expanse as vast as an ocean. Or, he was like a dazzling luster, illuminating every soul around him. What is more, his heroic efforts to enjoin the right and to forbid the wrong and his undaunted championship of the righteous path before the elite, rulers, and administrators could never be forgotten.[2]

The enthusiastic devotion he received from the people and the irresistible attraction they felt toward him were the hallmarks of his charismatic personality. He was rightly considered one of the few unfaltering guides of the Umma. Thābit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901), a non-Muslim philosopher, held the opinion that, of the few eminent personalities produced by Islam who could rightly be envied by the followers of other faiths, one was Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He added that Makka had always been a center of Islamic piety and learning, where accomplished scholars in every branch of learning converged from all parts of the world. However, even Makkans were dumbfounded by the scholarly attainments of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. They had never seen a man of his caliber.[3]

1 Bustānī, *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif*, 44.

2 ʿUmarī, *Maslak al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, 7:356–357.

3 *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif*, 44.

Sermons of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was also a celebrated orator inspired with a deep moral feeling. He could hold an audience spellbound. Whenever he preached about the Hereafter or described the bygone age of the Companions ﷺ, his entire audience was seen brimming with tears. Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf is well known for his eloquence, but Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was regarded as an equally capable speaker. Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlā', the famed grammarian and lexicographer, says that he had not seen orators of greater skill than Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, but Ḥasan was a more eloquent speaker than Ḥajjāj.[1]

Ḥasan's words carried weight with his audience because he was not merely a knowledgeable preacher or a skilled orator, but because he also possessed a pure soul. Whatever he said was moving to his listeners because it came from the depth of his heart. His speeches had a power that no other scholar or teacher in Kufa and Basra could match.

Another distinguishing feature of his sermons was their similarity to the speeches of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ. Imām Ghazālī wrote in *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* that there is consensus that the teachings of Ḥasan bore a close resemblance to the Messenger's own discourses, and that his conduct resembled that of the Companions ﷺ. Such qualities could not be found in other spiritual guides and preachers.[2]

The sermons Ḥasan al-Baṣrī delivered echoed the simple purity and moral courage of the Prophet's Companions ﷺ. In them, he spoke of the transitory nature of this world and human life and stressed the significance of the Final Reckoning and the Hereafter. He explored the meaning of faith and righteousness, inspired awe and reverence of Allāh Most High, and condemned self-indulgence and indecency. Ḥasan had the honor of being an associate of the Companions ﷺ. Thus, when he compares the moral degradation of the later Umayyad period with the simplicity, unflinching faith, and moral and spiritual excellence of earlier times, his words are especially forceful. When he condemns and lashes out at the contemptible changes of his time, his words shine with the fire of his own true heartfelt sorrow at the moral decline of the Umma.

Ḥasan's unmatched eloquence, flawless delivery, and unique clarity of style earned his sermons a distinguished place among the greatest Arabic

1 Ibid.

2 Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 1:68.

literature of his time. Comparing the moral condition of his own time with that of the Companions ﷺ, he observes:

> Such a regretful state it is: the people have been destroyed through their own fond hopes. They talk but do not act. Knowledge is theirs but without endurance. Faith they have, but no conviction. Why is it that I see men, but not minds; I hear lots of commotion, but not a single soul agreeable to the heart? People come only to depart. They acknowledge the truth, then deny it and make things lawful and unlawful at their own sweet will. Is your religion a sensual delight? If you are asked, "Do you have faith in the Day of Judgment?" you say yes. But no! it is not so. I swear by the Lord of the Day of Reckoning that you have spoken a lie.
>
> It is only befitting for the believer that he be sound of faith, a man of conviction. His knowledge demands forbearance, as moderation is an adornment for the learned. He is wise but soft-hearted; well-dressed and restrained [in order to conceal his poverty]; never wasteful, even if a man of substance. He is charitable and compassionate to the destitute, large-hearted and generous in giving to his kinsfolk their due, tireless and unflinching in rendering justice to others. He never crosses the prescribed limits in favoring his near and dear ones, nor does he find fault or pick out the errors of those he dislikes. A Muslim is indifferent to abuse and taunting, games and diversions, insults and backbiting. He never runs after what is not his right, nor denies what he owes to others. He never debases himself in seeking an apology, nor delights in the misfortune or misdeed of others.
>
> A believer is humble and reverent in his prayers, and quick to bow [before Allāh]. His words are a cure. His patience derives from being God-fearing. His silence is for reflection. He sees to take heed. He seeks company of the learned to acquire knowledge. He keeps silent among them to remain safe. And if he speaks, he speaks to benefit. He is pleased when he acts virtuously. He seeks forgiveness when he does wrong, and when reproached for something he desists. He is forbearing with those who act foolishly, and proves enduring when ill-treated. He does not abandon justice even when treated unfairly. He never seeks protection from anyone save Allāh.
>
> He is dignified among a crowd, praises Allāh when alone, content with his sustenance, grateful for his prosperity, and resigned when in distress. If he sits among the heedless he is written among those engaged in remembrance, and if he sits among those in remembrance he is written among those seeking forgiveness. Such were the Companions of the Prophet, each according to their

status, and such were the Muslims from among your righteous ancestors. But when you changed Allāh also changed his behavior with you. "Allāh does not change the condition of a people [for the worse] unless they change what is in themselves, but if He wills harm on a people, no one can ward it off. Apart from Him, they have no protector" [Q 13:11].[1]

On another occasion, commenting on the verses from Sūrat al-Furqān that describe the characteristics of the faithful, he said of the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ:

When the first Muslims heard this call from their Lord, they immediately affirmed it and its conviction entered into the depths of their hearts. They surrendered themselves unconditionally to the Most High. Their hearts and eyes—nay, their whole beings—lived under a constant consciousness of the omnipotent power of Allāh Almighty. By Allāh, when I saw them, I could discern from their faces that the unseen realities taught by revelation were not beyond their ken. They never indulged in futile discussion or vain quibbling. They had received a message from the Lord and accepted it.

Allāh Himself depicted their character beautifully in the Qur'ān: "And the servants of the Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility (*hawnan*)" [Q 25:63].

The word *hawn* used here, according to Arabic lexicographers, means softness, tranquility and dignity. Thereafter the Lord says, "And when the ignorant address them, they say: Peace!" [Q 25:63] It means that they were disciplined and patient and they never pay back the arrogant and foolish in the same coin. If anyone took issue with them, they did not lose their temper or patience. They spent their days with Allāh's servants listening to words of benefit from them. As for their nights, Allāh has Himself spoken highly of what they did after dark: "Those who spend the night in adoration of their Lord prostrate and standing" [Q 25:64].

Verily, these slaves of Allāh used to pass the night standing on their feet in prayer and placing their faces on the ground in prostration before their Lord, their tears flowing from their eyes, trembling in awe of Him. There was something, after all, which kept them in vigils throughout the nights and made them yield to submission during the day. The Almighty says that these are the persons who say: "Our Lord! Avert from us the punishment of Hellfire, for its wrath is indeed an affliction grievous" [Q 25:65].

1 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*, 66–70.

> Anything that befalls the son of Ādam then leaves is not an affliction; an affliction is that which will remain as long as the heavens and the earth remain. I swear by Allāh, besides whom there is no other Lord, that the Companions of the Prophet were truly faithful. They acted on what they professed, but alas, you are after your fond hopes. Friends, do not lean upon your airy hopes—may Allāh have mercy on you—for never has Allāh bestowed anything, whether of this world or the next, upon anyone simply because he longed for it.[1]

Thereafter he said, as he often used to remark after his discourses, that although his sermons lacked nothing, they were of little use to the people who had lost their softness of heart.

The call, preaching, and sermons of Ḥasan challenged and denounced the aims and objects, the designs and ambitions, the longings and fancies of his age. It became difficult for the society of his day to ignore or disregard his admonitions. Untold numbers returned as changed men after hearing Ḥasan's sermons. They offered earnest repentance for the lives of decadence and self-indulgence they had previously led. They made solemn affirmations of loyalty and obedience to Allāh Most High for the rest their lives. Ḥasan would urge his listeners to take in the true content of the faith, and would prescribe measures for eradicating their vices.

Ḥasan devoted a full sixty years of his life to religious preaching and the moral uplift of people. It is obviously difficult, then, to estimate the number of people who were reformed and spiritually redeemed during this period. ʿAwwām ibn Ḥawshab says that Ḥasan performed for sixty years the same task which the noble prophets used to do among their communities.[2]

Fearlessness

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was as much distinguished by his moral courage and unwavering pursuit of justice as he was in the spheres of scholarship and oration. He once openly criticized the caliph Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik[3] when someone asked him to express his opinion about the two insurrectionists, Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab and Ibn al-Ashʿath. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, "Don't be a party to either faction." A Syrian sprang to his feet and repeated the question, "And not even to that of the Leader of the Believers?" Ḥasan replied angrily, "Yes, not even to that of the Leader of the Believers. Yes, not even to that of the

1 Marwazī, *Qiyām al-Layl*, 12.

2 *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif*, 7:44.

3 He succeeded ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and ruled from mid 720 to January 724 CE.

Leader of the Believers." The intolerable and ferocious cruelty of Ḥajjāj ibn Yusuf[1] was legendary, but Ḥasan never held his tongue from expressing what he considered right and just, even during the rule of Ḥajjāj.

Hypocrites

The lightning military successes of the Muslim armies and the complete political domination of the Umayyads over an extensive area had created a class of people who had embraced Islam for the sake of material gains but were unable to incorporate the ethics and precepts of the religion into their everyday life. These people still had a long way to go to enter into Islam completely in the way the Qur'ān demands of every Muslim. The younger generation of Muslims also lacked education and training and had inherited many customs and practices of the pagan past. They had accepted Islam but had not surrendered themselves fully to the guidance of the revelation in their daily affairs, lifestyles, deeds, and morals. A large portion of the Muslim society, particularly the elite and the ruling classes, gradually adopted the ways of pre-Islamic ignorance. Since these were the people who held the keys to political domination, riches, and positions of influence, their godless behavior was imitated by the common people of Basra. Self-indulgence, vanity, jealousy, and lust for wealth and power were quickly capturing the spirits of people.

Some historians hold that hypocrisy was a passing nuisance that arose out of the unique conditions in Madīna during the time of the Messenger ﷺ. They believe that the problem of hypocrisy came to an end with the victory of Islam over paganism, and that the overriding supremacy of Islam left no room for any further struggle between truth and falsehood. We find many historians and commentators of the Qur'ān subscribing to the view that after that particular moment in history, there was no longer any reason for people to join Islam outwardly but remain secretly opposed to it, because the conditions had completely changed and people could now openly make a choice between Islam and paganism. Those who hold this view, however, overlook the fact that insincerity is a human failing as common and timeless as any other moral affliction. It is not at all necessary that there be contend-

1 Ḥajjāj, sometime governor of Hijaz, was ʿAbd al-Malik's viceroy over Iraq, Sijistan, Kerman, and Khurasan. One of the most ardent supporters of the Umayyads, he did everything to strengthen their caliphate. His cruelty gave rise to several furious revolts. During his long rule over Iraq, he put to death nearly 150,000 men, many on trumped up charges, some of whom were regarded among the noblest of the Arabs. At the time of his death, fifty thousand people were found rotting in his prisons.

ing forces to Islam and disbelief to produce hypocrites who might follow the truth outwardly while secretly opposing it.

During any period of Islamic rule, there is very often a segment of the population that is incapable of following the tenets of the faith wholeheartedly. These people profess their belief in Islam, but in the recesses of their hearts they harbor a lurking doubt about whether Islam is really the sole source of truth. Such people lack the moral courage to forsake Islam publicly, or perhaps the benefits they derive from Muslim society or the state prevent them from renouncing the religion even though they do not possess unflinching faith. Hence, these remain distracted and irresolute throughout their lives. Expediency is the norm for such people. In their lack of moral behavior, their selfishness, their double-dealing, their self-adornment, their heedlessness of the Hereafter, their timidity before power and authority, and their eagerness to exploit the poor and the weak, they are the lingering remnants of the hypocrites of earlier days referred to in the Qur'ān.

Indication of Hypocrisy

It is an achievement, as well as a proof of his insight, that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was aware not only that hypocrisy still existed in the Muslim society, but that it exerted considerable influence over the public life of the Muslims, especially among the ruling elite.[1]

Someone once asked Ḥasan al-Baṣrī if hypocrites were still to be found among the Muslims of his day. His reply was, "If the hypocrites desert the streets of Basra, you will find it hard to live in the city."[2]

Ḥasan meant by this that the majority of the people were those who paid mere lip service to Islam without allowing its principles to take root in their

1 Among the religious scholars of the later period, Shāh Waliyyullāh also subscribed to the view that hypocrisy is found in every age, and that the existence of hypocrites is not a phenomenon unique to any particular time or place. He believed that hypocrisy is of two types: hypocrisy of creed and hypocrisy of deed. Because of the cessation of revelation after Allāh's Final Messenger ﷺ, hypocrisy of creed is no longer discernible or is difficult to recognize, Hypocrisy of deed, however, has been rampant ever since. Speaking of his own time, he says in *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr*, "Seek the company of the nobility and their associates and attendants if you want to see what hypocrites are like. You will see that they prefer the wishes of rulers over the wishes of Allāh Almighty. Indeed, to the unprejudiced mind there is no difference between the hypocrites who personally heard the Messenger yet still practiced hypocrisy and these hypocrites who are born in this age and possess conclusive knowledge of the Sharī'a yet deviate from it and act against it. So too an example of hypocrisy are those rationalists who harbor many doubts in their hearts and forget the reality of the Final Abode." See *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr*, 13–14.

2 Firyābī, *Ṣifat al-Nifāq*, 68.

hearts, and without translating its teachings into moral behavior. On another occasion he remarked, "Glorified be Allāh! What hypocrites and self-seeking persons have come to have the upper hand on this Umma!"[1]

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was perfectly correct in his estimation of the self-centered rulers of his time, who were interested least of all in Islam and the Muslims. His apt characterization of hypocrisy as a canker festering on the body of the Umma demonstrates the candor of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's sermons and his call for reformation. There were several outstanding teachers among his contemporaries, but none could arouse the enthusiastic devotion of the people like Ḥasan. His scathing criticism and denunciation of the degenerate state of society shed light on the spirit and nature of the hypocrisy that had captured the soul of a large segment of the populace. Hypocrisy was a disease that was fast taking root in Muslim society.

Ḥasan described the character, morals, and behavior of the hypocrites, who could be seen in every walk of life: in the administration, the armed forces, business, and trade. The prevalent vices of his day were lust for wealth and power and an utter disregard for the Final Judgement. Ḥasan devoted himself to condemning these very evils and caused people to think about the eternal life after death. With his gift for eloquence, he vividly depicted the unseen realities which every hypocritical, indolent, and wayward person wished were buried in oblivion.

Death of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī

The spotless sincerity, outstanding piety, and moral and spiritual excellence of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī earned him the affection of everyone in Basra. When he died in 110/728, the entire population of Basra (which was, after the capital Damascus, the second largest city of the Islamic empire) attended his funeral, which took place on a Friday. Thus, for the first time in the city's history, its principal mosque remained empty at the hour of the late afternoon (ʿaṣr) prayer.[2]

After his death, Ḥasan's students and followers continued to spread his message without interruption. They invited people back to the religion, to unflinching submission to the Almighty, and contemplation of the final judgment on the Day of Reckoning. Twenty-two years after Ḥasan's death, the rule of the mighty Umayyads came to an end, giving rise to the caliphate of the Abbasids, who shifted the seat of power from Damascus to Baghdad.

1 Ibid., 57.

2 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 1:355.

Revolts against Tyranny

Along with the efforts directed toward propagation of the faith and moral and spiritual renewal, repeated attempts were also made to reorganize the caliphate in accordance with the political law of Islam, and thus end the monopoly of political authority enjoyed by the Umayyads, and later on by the Abbasids. Unfortunately, by that time the caliphate had been so entrenched in racial and tribal loyalties that no call to undo the established order could be successful unless it could also invoke a noble lineage and had the backing of a loyal tribal following. We find, therefore, that most of the individuals who raised the banner of revolt against the Umayyads and Abbasids were of the Ahl al-Bayt, descendents of the Messenger ﷺ who could inspire the enthusiasm needed to overthrow the despised rulers. Since they represented the religious drive toward reform and renewal and enjoyed the sympathy and support of religiously minded people, these political reformers stood a fair chance of success in their endeavors.

After the massacre at Karbala,[1] a number of descendants of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ tried to stage a revolution. Ḥusayn's grandson ﵁, Zayd ibn ʿAlī, attempted to rise against Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik. Imām Abū Ḥanīfa, founder of the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence, apologized to Zayd ibn ʿAlī for not being able to join in his expedition, but contributed ten thousand dirhams to assist Zayd's army.[2] Zayd's attempt failed, however, and he was killed in 122/740.

Thereafter, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Maḥḍ (ibn al-Ḥasan al-Muthannā ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī), a descendant of Ḥasan known as al-Nafs al-Zakiyya ("the Pure Soul"), raised the banner of revolt in Madīna; meanwhile, his brother, Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbdillāh, did the same against Caliph Manṣūr in Kufa. Imām Abū Ḥanīfa and Imām Mālik, both founders of schools of sacred law, issued pronouncements supporting the validity of Ibrāhīm's claim to the caliphate.[3] Imām Abū Ḥanīfa also extended his support to include financial assistance, and he even dissuaded Ḥasan ibn Qaḥṭaba, one of Manṣūr's generals, from fighting against Ibrāhīm.[4]

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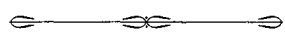
1 Ḥusayn ﵁, the grandson of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and son of Caliph ʿAlī ﵁, was massacred along with his followers on 10 Muḥarram, 61 (October 10, 680), at Karbala by an Umayyad detachment for not taking the oath of fealty to Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya. The butchery caused a thrill of horror in the world of Islam.

2 Kardarī, *Manāqib al-Imām al-Aʿẓam Abī Ḥanīfa*, 1:55.

3 Imām Mālik advised the people of Madīna to help Ibrāhīm even if they had taken the oath of fealty to Manṣūr (Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 5:214).

4 Some historians are of the opinion that the action taken by Caliph Manṣūr against Imām

These efforts, however, were also doomed to failure. Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya met a heroic death at Madīna on the 15th of Ramaḍān 145 (7th December 762), while Ibrāhīm was killed in the same year at Kufa on the 24th of Dhū 'l-Qa'da. All these efforts were dead failures owing to the military strength and well-established rule of the Umayyads and Abbasids. However, they succeeded in setting a precedent for later generations, encouraging them to rise in revolt against tyranny and injustice. Instead of submitting to the inducements of wealth and power, these men preferred to shed the last drop of their blood for the cause of justice and righteousness. Despite their failures, the strenuous and ceaseless efforts made by these heroes of Islam have passed on a torch that will forever keep the spirit of Islam glowing bright. "Among the Believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allāh. Of them some have completed their vow, and some still wait: but they have never changed their determination in the least" (Q 33:23).



Abū Ḥanīfa was not for the imam's refusal to accept the post of chief *qāḍī*, but for taking sides with Ibrāhīm (Manāẓir Aḥsan Gīlānī. *Abū Ḥanīfa kī Siyāsī Zindagī*, 458).

CHAPTER 3

The Ḥadīth Masters & Jurists

The Abbasids

The Abbasids succeeded the Umayyads not only in temporal power but in their worldly attitude to life, their hereditary and autocratic system of government, their exploitation of the public treasury for personal gain, and their delight in the rounds of pleasure and self-gratification. If there was any difference between the two empires, it was that during the reign of the Abbasids, Arabs dominated the high offices of the state, while previously, under the Umayyads, non-Arabs had the upper hand in administration. The vices peculiar to the Arabs under the Umayyads had thus given way to the failings of the other nations.

The dominance of Abbasid rule ran over such an extensive area that Hārūn al-Rashīd once remarked when he saw a cloud, "Rain wherever you will, for a portion of the produce of your shower will come back to me." Ibn Khaldūn estimated that the annual income of the Abbasid Caliphate during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd was more than 7,500 *qinṭārs* (70,150,000 dinars),[1] and it had increased considerably by the time of Ma'mūn. The increased wealth and prosperity caused an influx of people into the capital from the most distant parts of the empire. These included performers—musicians, singers, poets, and jesters, who came in pursuit of their vocation of providing amusement to the elite—and every sort of craftsman and artisan whose wares satisfied men of more refined taste.[2] Historians have preserved an account of the marriage of Ma'mūn, which illustrates the wealth and opulence, the pomp and pageantry, the fascination and pleasure that surrounded the rulers:

Ma'mūn, along with his family, courtiers, nobles, military and civil chiefs,

1 Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima*, 151.

2 Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, 3:91, 5:115.

personal attendants, bodyguards, and the entire army remained as guests of his prime minister, Ḥasan ibn Sahl, to whose daughter [Ma'mūn] was betrothed. Ḥasan entertained the whole company for nineteen days on such a lavish and gorgeous scale that even the lowliest of the king's party spent those few days like an aristocrat. The members of the king's household and chief officers of the state were showered with balls of musk and ambergris, each wrapped in a paper inscribed with the name of an estate, and they were given a slave, a team of horses, robes of honor, or some other gift. The recipient then took [the paper] to the treasurer, who delivered to him the property which had fallen to his lot. A carpet of surpassing beauty, made of gold thread and inlaid with pearls and rubies, was unrolled for Ma'mūn. As soon as he was seated on it, precious pearls of unique size and splendor were again showered on his feet, which made a mesmerizing scene on the resplendent carpet.[1]

Some Preachers of Baghdad

Amid this life of dissipation and carefree abandon, there were a few inspired souls who detached themselves from the fascinations and immoral behaviors of society. These pious ones had given themselves up to the propagation of the faith, self-purification, education, and spreading religious sciences. The lifelong object of these teachers was to protect and fortify the spiritual substance of the community's faith, to forge a link between the Creator and creation, and to expound and elucidate the teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunna. These men steadfastly upheld the traditions of detachment, fearlessness, and undaunted championship of the truth. Those in power could neither buy them nor force them to give up the task they had taken upon themselves. Their seminaries were true havens of shelter and safety in a tumultuous ocean of profane materialism, no less vast or productive than the temporal kingdoms of the day. If the caliphs and their representatives had control over the body and flesh of their subjects, the writings of these teachers put the souls of the people back into their own hands.

There are more than a few instances where these men of Allāh were able to hold their own against the most powerful emperors. Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd was once on an official visit to Raqqa while the celebrated ḥadīth master ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Mubārak happened to arrive. The entire population of the city came out to receive him and no one remained to attend the caliph. The multitude was so great that a large number of people broke their shoes in

1 Shiblī Nuʿmānī, *Al-Maʾmūn*, 156–57; cf. *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 1:258–59.

the throng. A maidservant of the caliph who had witnessed the procession from a balcony inquired who the celebrity was. When she was told that he was a religious scholar, ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Mubārak of Khurasan, she remarked, "Kingship belongs indeed to him and not to Hārūn, who dares not go anywhere without guards and attendants."[1]

Baghdad of the Abbasid period exhibited both of these trends. If, on the one hand, people of every calling and trade were gathering in the city in search of riches, amusement, and gratification, there was also, on the other, a great influx of religious teachers and students from all over the world. Baghdad had become such a great center of the pious and the learned that the monographs and histories of the period give the impression that none save pure and saintly souls lived in Baghdad, and that its confines echoed with the remembrance and praise of Allāh. This atmosphere of piety and religious fervor was due mainly to Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ (d. 187/803), Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 297/910), Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), and Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/841), men who dedicated themselves to the propagation of the faith. The moral rectitude and integrity of these masters, their kindheartedness and sincerity, detachment, contentment, benevolence, and readiness to make sacrifices for others endeared them to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. They upheld and realistically demonstrated Islamic morality, with the result that countless Jews, Christians, Magians, and Sabians who came into contact with them embraced Islam.[2]

Two Urgent Problems

It was truly imperative at this juncture of Islamic history to foster and strengthen the norms of communal, social, and political conduct of the Umma, just as its moral and spiritual heritage had been protected and nourished in the past, to ensure that Islam would continue as the guiding light for future generations. By this time, the Muslim Umma had become the most powerful and extensive empire in the world, extending over almost the whole of Asia, parts of Africa, and Spain. New issues were arising as Muslims came into contact with the peoples of other lands. Problems relating to business and cultivation, to protection-tax and land revenue, and to the customs and rites of subjects living in the lands under control had to be addressed in accordance with the Sharīʿa, and it was simply impossible to set aside or defer

1 *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 2:238.

2 For details, see *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 1:247–51, 323–24; 2:127–28; 3:215–17; 4:319–20.

any of these questions. The Islamic state was in urgent need of a detailed and satisfactory answer to each one. Otherwise, it would have been forced to adopt Roman or Byzantine laws, codes, and regulations for the conduct of its administrative business. Any complacency on the part of the ʿulamā' would have produced the same confusion and waywardness that can be witnessed today under modern so-called Islamic states. Indeed, the result might have been even more disastrous, since indifference or negligence on the part of exegetes and ḥadīth masters at that crucial stage would have deprived the Umma of its purpose for thousands of years, if not for all time. As a poet says: "A moment's negligence makes the way a hundred years longer."

One of the two central problems requiring immediate attention was the collection and compilation of all the traditions, or ḥadīths, of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, which had by that time been written down or memorized by a large number of ḥadīth scholars spread throughout the Islamic realm.[1] The Sunna, represented in the ḥadīth corpus, was a major source of legislation because the details of the Sharīʿa are only hinted at or sometimes not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān. Thus, the Prophetic ḥadīths constituted the only means of deriving the rules of conduct for the Umma and safeguarding the Islamic character of the Muslim community.

In fact, the Sunna comprises a detailed record of the twenty-three years of the prophecy of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, transmitted through the eyewitness accounts of his Companions, relatives, and friends. It is a distinction not enjoyed by any other prophet.[2] Apart from its educational and doctrinal value, the Sunna is a reservoir of guidance for moral rectitude and spiritual uplift, for reverence and awe of Allāh, and for infusing people with a dynamic energy to combat evil. The ḥadīth will always generate standard-bearers who will fill the people with the true content of faith, with enthusiasm and self-confidence, and will bring them back to the fountainhead of divine

1 The collection and compilation of ḥadīth had actually been taken up by the successors of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. The active interest taken by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz has already been referred to in Chapter 1. In the second century AH there existed numerous ḥadīth compilations, of which the more well-known include those of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), Ibn Jurayj al-Makkī (d. 150/767), Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), Saʿīd ibn Abī ʿArūba al-Madanī (d. 156/773), Maʿmar ibn Rāshid al-Yamānī (d. 153/770), and Rabīʿ ibn Ṣabīḥ (d. 160/777). It was then necessary to subject the ḥadīth to more minute scrutiny, and to classify and interpret them in accordance with carefully devised norms of criticism.

2 Insofar as the Prophet ﷺ enjoyed divine guidance to give authoritative declarations on questions, moral, social, or doctrinal, his ḥadīth really constitute a record of divinely inspired sayings, and consequently occupy a totally different position from what is commonly understood by traditions in the Christian Church.

guidance and enable them to eliminate the deviations and innovations from their beliefs and practices.

The second urgent need was to collect, systematize, and formulate new rulings based on the teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunna to address all the spiritual and political questions of the day. The Qur'ān and the Sunna provide, undoubtedly, the guiding principles that can be applied to every aspect of the social and intellectual development of human beings. On the other hand, change is a necessary part of human progress. This is why analogical deduction of legal opinions (*ijtihād*) under the inspiration of the Qur'ān and Sunna became necessary to address the new situations and requirements of the expanding Islamic community.

Compilation of Ḥadīth

Here mention must be made of the divine arrangements made for safeguarding the ḥadīth. Allāh Almighty had selected for it a nation celebrated for its memory, truthfulness, and fidelity. Whatever the Companions of the Allāh's Messenger ﷺ saw or heard from him, they preserved with utmost care and transmitted to the succeeding generations. The memory of the earlier prophets was preserved by their followers through sculpture and portraits, but the Companions of the Prophet of Islam, for whom representation in pictures and engravings was prohibited, left a description of the appearance and manner of their Prophet so vivid and lively, yet so completely free from all vices, that there was no need for visual imagery.[1]

Diligence of the Ḥadīth Masters

Allāh Almighty provided Islam with hundreds of earnest scholars peerless in their memory and intelligence, industry and enthusiasm, and erudition and scholarly attainment, for the cultivation and development of the science of ḥadīth. A large number of these were non-Arabs from distant lands who set off on extensive travels all over the Islamic world in search of ḥadīths. Indifferent to most everything else, they devoted themselves to attending the lectures of the great scholars of theology and planning their own work of collecting the sayings of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ and the accounts of his deeds and manners. No other science, nor any civilization, can claim to have had so many brilliant minds as devoted and zealous, and at the same time as meticu-

1 For this, see the opening chapter of Imām Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī's *Al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya*.

lous and trustworthy, as were the ḥadīth masters. They moved heaven and earth to hunt for ḥadīths in every corner of the Islamic world. Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī set off on his errand at the age of fourteen and traveled all the way from Bukhara to Egypt.[1] Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) says that he traveled 3,000 *farsakhs* (9,000 miles) on foot and thereafter stopped counting. Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) of Andalusia attended lectures of the scholars of ḥadīth at Andalusia, Iraq, Hijaz, and Yemen, traversing the whole of North Africa from Tangier to Suez and then across the Red Sea to Yemen. A large number of ḥadīth masters have left accounts of their travels through Asia, Africa, and Spain.[2] In fact, it was not uncommon in those days to journey from Andalusia in Europe to Khurasan in Central Asia for the sake of acquiring knowledge from the reputed scholars of theology in different cities.

Biographical Evaluation

These brilliant scholars did not simply collect and compile the prophetic ḥadīths. They also investigated the narrators of the ḥadīths: their integrity, truthfulness, and moral and spiritual excellence. In this way, an account of the lives of all the transmitters of the sayings or acts of the Messenger ﷺ, who had been given the promise "We raised your reputation high" (Q 94:4) by his Lord, came to light. Hundreds of thousands of narrators became known to posterity for handing down a ḥadīth or part of a ḥadīth. This led to the creation of a new science known as *asmāʾ al-rijāl* (biographical evaluation, lit. names of men). This branch of knowledge is a living monument to the deep wisdom, scholarly attainment, sense of responsibility, intellectual insight, and lofty ambition of the people who developed it. In reality, the Umma can rightly feel proud of their achievement. In his introduction to the ḥadīth master Ibn Ḥajar's *Al-Iṣāba fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba* (Hitting the Mark in Distinguishing the Companions), Dr. A. Sprenger pays glowing tribute to the servants of ḥadīth:

1 Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (194/810–256/870) was born in Bukhara. When still a youth he made the pilgrimage and remained for some time in Mecca attending the lectures of great scholars of theology. Then he set off on extensive travels which, over the course of sixteen years, took him all over Islamic Asia. Of the extensive number of ḥadīths he had collected, he finally selected 7,275 authentic narrations, applying the most intense scrutiny. His collection, which is divided into 160 books, is entitled *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (The Authentic Collection) and is considered as the first and most authoritative of the Six Authentic Collections (*Ṣiḥāḥ Sitta*). Bukhārī died in a village near Samarkand, where his tomb is a much-visited site.

2 See Shērwānī, *ʿUlamā-i Salaf*, 20–22.

> The glory of the literature of the Mohammadans is its literary biography. There is no nation, nor has there been any which like them has during twelve centuries recorded the life of every man of letters. If the biographical records of the Musalmans were collected, we should probably have accounts of the lives of half a million of distinguished persons, and it would be found that there is not a decennium of their history, nor a place of importance which has not its representatives.[1]

Trustworthiness of Ḥadīth Masters

The ḥadīth masters did not simply narrate the biographical accounts of the transmitters of ḥadīths. They also took all possible care to record authentic descriptions of the character, disposition, integrity, prudence, knowledge, and strength of memory of those narrators. They gleaned all available information about the narrators provided by their contemporaries, without any partiality or fear or favor, even if the narrator was a pious and illuminated soul or a ruler. One of the historians says:

> The matchless courage exhibited by the ḥadīth masters in subjecting the narrators of ḥadīths to an impartial and close scrutiny can justly claim a proud place in the histories of Islamic peoples. There were numerous caliphs and commanders noted for their despotism, among the narrators, but the ḥadīth masters assigned them that very rank which they deserved. Imām Wakīʿ was a reputed master but his father was a treasurer in the employ of the state. Therefore, whenever Wakīʿ had occasion to relate a ḥadīth handed down by his father, he accepted (it) if it was supported by another reliable narrator and rejected it if nobody in support of his father was to be found. Such a conscientious and cautious lot were these ḥadīth masters.[2]

To give one example of their diligence, a ḥadīth master who had knowledge of certain narrations was sought out in 154/771 by another ḥadīth master, Muʿādh ibn Muʿādh. However, since the narrator relied on his written memoirs when relating what he had heard, Muʿādh ibn Muʿādh rejected all of his ḥadīths on the basis of his weak memory.[3] Muʿādh ibn Muʿādh was once offered ten thousand dinars simply to remain silent about a certain person's reliability as a witness. He refused the offer contemptuously, saying that he could not

1 See Sprenger's introduction to Ibn Ḥajar's *Iṣāba*, 1:1.

2 ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 11:130.

3 Ibid., 6:211.

suppress evidence.[1] Can history offer any better examples of honesty and precaution than this?[2]

Retentive Memory of Ḥadīth Masters

Most of the ḥadīth masters were Persian and Turkmen of elite stock. They were a robust, vigorous, and resolute people with a strong, retentive memory whose ardent desire for acquiring knowledge had been kindled by Islam. Like any other human faculty that grows stronger or weaker with use or disuse, retentive memory can be strengthened considerably. The human faculty of memory is losing its retentive power these days owing to easy access to printed material, so that today many people find the wonderful feats of strong retentive memory performed in the past difficult to imagine. History bears witness to many indisputable instances of extraordinary retentive memory, which are by no means impossible or beyond human experience. The fact is that an aptitude for one's subject of study, combined with constant application and profound interest, can produce a level of proficiency that may seem miraculous to the uninitiated.

For example, when Imām Bukhārī arrived at Baghdad, the scholars there invented a novel way to test his memory. They selected ten scholars who were assigned ten ḥadīths each and told to relate these to Bukhārī, but with the chain of transmission of each ḥadīth affixed to the text of another ḥadīth.[3] Each of these men narrated their mixed-up ḥadīths as planned and then asked Bukhārī to give his opinion about their authenticity. Bukhārī replied after every narration that he had no knowledge of such a ḥadīth. The knowledgeable understood the secret in his answer while the unaware laughed at his ignorance. After every one of them had finished narrating, Bukhārī addressed the first man and repeated each of the ten ḥadīths he had narrated, but with the correct chain of narrators. Thereafter, he turned to each of the other questioners and recounted the corrected versions of their ḥadīths one by one. Everyone present was dumbfounded by his sharpness and exceptional memory.[4]

1 Ibid., 6:431.

2 Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, *Khuṭbāt-i Madrās*, 59–60.

3 The introductory portion of a ḥadīth consists of the chain of narrators who transmitted a particular saying attributed to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, while the main text comprises the quotation of the Messenger's words or action.

4 ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 1:487.

Popular Enthusiasm

The selfless devotion and care with which the ḥadīth masters devoted themselves to the study of the Sunna of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ aroused a general awareness and enthusiasm for the science of ḥadīth among the masses. People flocked to the lectures of the ḥadīth masters by the thousands, with an avid desire to benefit from these gatherings. It is related by the historians that despite the huge crowds who attended the lectures of the ḥadīth masters, these meetings were more disciplined and tidy than the rulers' courts.

It is reported that the number of people attending the lectures of Abū Khālid Yazīd ibn Hārūn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 206/821) in Baghdad exceeded 70,000. Caliph Muʿtaṣim bi-'Llāh once dispatched a trusted aide to report on the number of persons attending the discourse of ʿĀṣim ibn ʿAlī, a master who lectured in a grove on the outskirts of Baghdad. He estimated 124,000 people in attendance. Another historian, Aḥmad ibn Jaʿfar al-Khuttulī, says that when Abū Muslim al-Kajjī (d. 292/905) came to Baghdad, he assembled a meeting at Ghassān Square for dictating ḥadīths. Seven persons were appointed to repeat what Abū Muslim dictated. Apart from the people who came to listen to the discourse, a large number took down the ḥadīths he narrated. The inkpots counted after this gathering exceeded 40,000. Another scholar of repute, Abū Bakr Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Firyābī (d. 301/913), had to employ 316 persons to repeat his words to the crowd attending his lectures. It is estimated that about 30,000 persons attended his lectures, of which 10,000 took down the notes of his discourses.[1] Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firabrī (d. 320/932) reports that 90,000 people heard *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* personally from the author Imām Bukhārī.[2]

The Six Authentic Collections (Ṣiḥāḥ Sitta)

Unprecedented popular enthusiasm, devotion, and ardent desire for the cultivation of religious sciences were helpful in obtaining an authentic and trustworthy collection of ḥadīths, which is unquestionably a storehouse of guidance and a valuable asset for the Umma. Among the compilations of ḥadīth, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works of Bukhārī and Muslim are held up as undisputed authorities, and the narrations accepted by both men are known as the "agreed-upon ones," signifying a high degree of reliability.[3] Other works

1 *ʿUlamā-i Salaf*, 68.

2 *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 1:492.

3 Shāh Waliyyullāh writes in *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha*: "Ḥadīth scholars agree that all the connected narrations reported to have been related or performed by the Prophet himself and

held in high esteem but taking their place after the collections of Bukhārī and Muslim include the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Imām Mālik (d. 179/795), the *Jāmiᶜ* of Imām Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/888), and the collections of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), and Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Māja (d. 273/886). All of the later movements toward reformation and regeneration in Islam owe their existence to the accomplishments of the ḥadīth masters, since no effort can succeed even now without drawing inspiration from these beacons of light.

Compilation of Jurisprudence

Like the compilation of ḥadīth, the codification of laws regulating public and private life, the amplification of the body of law, and the deduction of rules for issuing decisions in legal matters were urgent problems that had to be tackled immediately. Islam had penetrated the far-off lands of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Iran, and other places where its impact on local habits, customs, and practices had given rise to many complicated problems. To solve these problems in consonance with the spirit of Islam required a deep knowledge of the prevailing conditions in these countries, the customs and traditions of the different sections of society, the patterns of human behavior, and a penetrating intellect, along with a strong command of Islamic teachings, the Qur'ān and Sunna, and the history and language of the Arabs.

The Four Jurists of Islam

We are again fortunate that Allāh favored Islam with models of unsurpassed intelligence and knowledge, earnestness and trustworthiness, who stepped forward for the service of the Umma in this field. These men of note include the four founders of juristic schools: Abū Ḥanīfa Nuᶜmān ibn Thābit (d. 150/767), Abū ʿAbdillāh Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiᶜī (d. 204/819), and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). These men were highly esteemed scholars noted for their outstanding piety, service to the community, scholarship, and understanding of legal matters. They dedicated their lives to their noble cause, established a lifestyle of contentment and resignation, and turned their backs on all the inducements of wealth, power, and position. Abū Ḥanīfa twice refused the high office of chief justice offered him by the caliph and was cast into prison, where he eventually died of the

reported in these two collections are undisputedly correct, for the chains of narrators given in these books are complete. Anyone who denigrates these compilations is an apostate and a dissenter" (*Ḥujjat Allāh*, 1:133).

corporal punishment inflicted on him. Mālik ibn Anas was flogged so severely that his shoulder blade was dislocated.[1] Shāfiʿī led a life of difficulty resulting in irreparable loss to his health. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal set his face against the official school of the dominant theology of his time. He was tried before a court of inquisition and thrown into prison, but he steadfastly held to the tradition of the orthodox school.

Each of these jurists also left such lengthy treatises on jurisprudence and legal rulings as could hardly be produced even through the coordinated efforts of several people. Abū Ḥanīfa is reported to have formulated 83,000 juristic rulings, of which 38,000 pertained to acts of worship and 45,000 to transactions, rights, and duties between Muslims.[2] Another authority, Shams al-A'imma al-Kardarī, writes that the total number of Abū Ḥanīfa's legal opinions was 600,000.[3] The *Mudawwana*, comprising Mālik ibn Anas's religious and judicial edicts, contains 36,000 decisions.[4] The collection of writings and lectures of Shāfiʿī known under the title *Kitāb al-Umm* runs into seven lengthy volumes. The decisions of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal were compiled by Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923) in forty volumes.[5]

Disciples of the Four Jurists

The founders of juristic schools were fortunate to have successors and disciples who not only compiled and redacted the compositions of their masters, but also made improvements and additions to them. Of the pupils of Abū Ḥanīfa was Abū Yūsuf, an eminent legal mind and later chief justice under Hārūn al-Rashīd. He produced such scholarly works as *Kitāb al-Kharāj* on the principles of Islamic economics. Imām Abū Ḥanīfa's other disciples included such illustrious writers and jurists as Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī and Zufar ibn Hudhayl, who firmly established and popularized the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence. ʿAbdullāh ibn Wahab, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Qāsim, Ashhab ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, and Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā al-Laythī were disciples of Mālik ibn Anas who propagated the

1 The point at the issue was whether the divorce given under compulsion is effective or not. The caliphs in those days used to take the pledge of fealty from the populace with a stipulation that if they broke the pledge, their wives would automatically be divorced. Imām Mālik's legal opinion that a divorce given under compulsion was ineffective made this stipulation in the pledge ineffective, thus causing a stir in official circles.

2 Amīn, *Fajr al-Islām*, 2:188; Makkī, *Manāqib al-Imām*, 96.

3 Kardarī, *Manāqib al-Imām*, 144.

4 Amīn, *Ḍuḥā 'l-Islām*, 2:215.

5 Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 2:361.

Mālikī system in Egypt and North Africa. Shāfiʿī was fortunate to have Yūsuf ibn Yaḥyā al-Buwayṭī, Ismāʿīl ibn Yaḥyā al-Muzanī, and Rabīʿ ibn Sulaymān al-Murādī to compile, edit, and codify his legal decisions. Ibn Qudāma, a research scholar and accomplished writer, wrote the *Mughnī* to compile the rulings of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. He work occupies a proud place among the Islamic juristic works.

Benefits of Jurisprudence

That jurists of redoubtable scholarship were born in the first few centuries of the Islamic era demonstrates the vitality and inherent capability of the Umma. The endeavors of the jurists provided a framework for the manifestation of Islamic ideals and ethical precepts in the day-to-day affairs of the people and protected them from the intellectual confusion and social anarchy which has brought many nations to ruin in their earliest stages. These jurists established the Islamic legal system on a firm foundation and formulated its principles in such a way as could always solve new problems that confronted the Umma in the future and provide a pattern of behavior in harmony with the spirit of Islam.

CHAPTER 4

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

Metaphysics

By the beginning of the second/eighth century, Muslims had gained familiarity with the Hellenistic intellectual tradition. The philosophical thought of the Greeks was little more than sophistry and wordplay devoid of any basis in reality. The notions and ideas of mankind, limited as they are, can only find expression in human language, which is wholly inadequate to describe the nature and attributes of the Limitless Being. Such questions as the nature of Allāh, His attributes, and His creative power do not lend themselves to analysis, experimentation, or rational explanation in the way that tangible objects do. This is true primarily because man does not possess the requisite knowledge or the basic principles and experiences to deal with these exalted matters. The entire structure of mankind's thoughts, ideas, and imagination rests fundamentally on sensory perception. In truth, divine revelation through Allāh's apostles is the only means of acquiring knowledge of these matters with any certitude, for this alone can provide mankind with the intimate knowledge of the Supreme Being and His attributes. Trust in the prophets, therefore, is a mark of prudence and sound intellect.

Muslims possessed the Qur'ān and the Sunna, which provided an answer to all intellectual and spiritual questions and left no justification for indulging in philosophical speculation. The Companions of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, their successors, the jurists, and the ḥadīth scholars all took the same position. Early Muslims were furthermore preoccupied with the propagation of their faith, the compilation of religious sciences, and the political conquests that brought about numerous problems concerning private and public life that had to be reconciled with the ethical norms of Islam. However, with the translation of Greek and Syriac works and close contact with the academics, philosophers, and scholars of other civilizations, a segment of the Muslims

began to take an interest in the so-called rational and intellectual interpretation of the revealed truth.

These people, discontent with the realistic and direct answers to the spiritual questions provided by scripture (which were in fact more profound, well-grounded, and satisfying to the intellect), were attracted by the sophistry of philosophical speculation. The result of their endeavors were fruitless controversies pertaining to the nature and attributes of Allāh, the eternal or accidental nature of His Word, the seeing of Allāh through corporeal eyes, predestination, and free will, although these issues were neither necessary for theological purposes nor had any benefit for cultural or social advancement. These discussions had an undeniably divisive influence on the solidarity of the Umma and were detrimental to its strength and endurance.

Muʿtazilism

At the head of this group of religious philosophers were the Muʿtazilīs. They were regarded as rationalists and dialecticians because they had made philosophical speculation the criterion for determining faith and apostasy. They endeavored with all the wits at their command to reconcile religion with philosophy, faith with so-called reason; whereas jurists and ḥadīth scholars, on the other hand, adhered to the doctrinal tenets of their predecessors and considered such quibbling not only futile but harmful to the Umma. Muʿtazilism did not quite take root until the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. But it was only during the rule of his son Maʾmūn, who since his upbringing had been very impressed with Greek thought and rationalism, and his approach matched that of the Muʿtazilites, that the star of the Muʿtazilī school clearly rose over the horizon. Ibn Abī Dāwūd, an ardent propagator of Muʿtazilism and chief justice to the Abbasid Caliphate, exerted his influence to make it the state doctrine. Maʾmūn had the impatience of a youth and the obstinacy of an autocrat.[1] He made it possible for the Muʿtazilīs to exercise inordinate influence over the whole empire.

The doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān[2] was held as the basic tenet

1 An example of his rashness is furnished by his declaration of the preference of ʿAlī over the first three caliphs and of the validity of temporary marriage contracts, which caused considerable resentment among the masses. He later had to retrace his steps upon intervention from Yaḥyā ibn Aktham (*Ḍuḥā 'l-Islām*, 3:165; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdād*, 45).

2 The controversy regarding the creation of Qurʾān—its finite or eternal nature—was entirely a philosophical speculation, which, even according to the Muʿtazilī historians, served only to shake people's faith in the divine origin of the Qurʾān. Ḥadīth scholars opposed the interpretations of the Muʿtazilī school, holding them to be wrong and harmful to the Umma. The Muʿtazilīs are commonly

of the Muʿtazilī school. It was enforced by invoking the power and influence of the state, and was made a criterion for determining one's heresy or one's adherence to the true faith. This brought forth vehement opposition from the ḥadīth scholars, with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal at the helm of the movement.

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was born in Baghdad in Rabīʿ al-Awwal 164/780. He hailed from the Arab tribe of Shaybān, which was renowned for its courage, endurance, grit, and vigor.[1] His grandfather, Ḥanbal ibn Hilāl, had migrated from Basra to Khurasan and was appointed governor of Sarakhsh under the Umayyads, but he was sympathetic to the Abbasid scheme to install Banū Hāshim, the descendants of the Prophet ﷺ, in place of the Umayyads. After his father's death, his mother migrated to Baghdad, where Aḥmad was born. Although placed in dire circumstances, his mother took pains to provide him with the best possible education. Aḥmad, despite his lack of means, also learned to be industrious, patient, resolute, and self-restrained. He committed the Qur'ān to memory while still young, studied literature for some time, and then enlisted in an office to gain proficiency in writing.

Aḥmad possessed a virtue and a purity of conscience from his early childhood. His uncle held the post of an official reporter in Baghdad and used to send dispatches to his superiors about the affairs of the city. Once he handed over a bundle of his dispatches to Aḥmad for delivery to a courier, but Aḥmad threw them away in the river because he thought they contained secret reports about certain persons. While he was working as an apprentice in the correspondence office, many housewives whose husbands were away on military duty came to have their letters read out to them and replies written on their behalf. Aḥmad would oblige them, but he refused to write anything he considered undignified or against the Sharīʿa. It was on the basis of these distinctive qualities that a discerning man (Haytham ibn Jamīl) predicted that "if the young man remains alive, he will be a model for the people of his time."[2]

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regarded as rationalist and progressive, but they proved to be the most turbulent sectarians, since they endeavored to stifle all opposition to their creed. They filled the entire Islamic world with rancor and fanned the flame of hatred between different segments of the populace. The manner in which they dealt with their opponents is reminiscent of the courts of Inquisition set up by the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages for the repression of liberal thinkers. This behavior is what ultimately gave a death blow to Muʿtazilism.

1 The famous commander under Caliph Abū Bakr, Muthannā ibn Ḥāritha, hailed from the same tribe.

2 Dhahabī, *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 16.

In religious sciences, Aḥmad paid special attention to the ḥadīths. In the beginning he took notes of the ḥadīths from Abū Yūsuf and then studied for four years under a famous ḥadīth scholar of Baghdad, Haytham ibn Bashīr (d. 182/798).[1] During this period he also received education from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī, Abū Bakr ibn ʿAyyāsh, and a few other reputed teachers of ḥadīth. Aḥmad was an avid and industrious student. He often wanted to leave home for his studies so early in the morning that his mother had to beg him to wait until the call for the morning prayer was heard and the darkness had at least begun to fade away.

After completing his education in Baghdad, he set out for Basra, Hijaz, Yemen, Syria, and Upper Mesapotamia (Jazīra)[2] to attend the lectures of the reputed scholars of ḥadīth in these places. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal met Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī in 187/803 while on his first visit to Hijaz.[3] He met Shāfiʿī again in Baghdad after he had expanded the science of jurisprudence into a comprehensive system and developed the doctrine of *ijmāʿ* (consensus). Aḥmad had acquired such proficiency by then that Shāfiʿī used to depend on his knowledge, and often asked Aḥmad to enlighten him about the authenticity of certain ḥadīths.

Aḥmad wanted to set off for Rayy, in Iran, to attend the lectures of a reputed ḥadīth scholar, Jarīr ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, but could not go because of a lack of funds. He often remarked that if he had even ninety dirhams, he would have left for Rayy. Another incident indicative of his zeal for acquiring knowledge of ḥadīth has been related by the historians. In 198/813 he decided to depart to Hijaz and then, after performing the ḥajj, to Sana'a, Yemen, to listen to ḥadīth from ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn al-Humām. One of his colleagues, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, also promised to accompany him. However, when they were circumambulating the Kaʿba, they happened to meet ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn al-Humām. Ibn Maʿīn was acquainted with him so he greeted him and introduced Aḥmad to him. He also made a request to give them some time for learning the ḥadīths from him. After ʿAbd al-Razzāq left, Aḥmad told Ibn Maʿīn that it was not befitting for them to take advantage of the shaykh's presence in Makka to listen the ḥadīths from him. Although Ibn Maʿīn pleaded

1 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad*, 23.

2 Jazīra is the name used for the uplands of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria and southeastern Turkey. It refers to the northern section of Mesopotamia, which together with Sawād, made up Iraq. The name means "island," and at one time referred to the land between the river Euphrates and Tigris.

3 Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, 33.

that it was a blessing from Allāh that the shaykh's presence in Makka had saved them from a lengthy journey of two months at great hardship and expense, Aḥmad refused to listen to ḥadīth from ʿAbd al-Razzāq without having undertaken the journey to Sana'a. He said, "I would be ashamed before Allāh if I break the journey undertaken with the intention of learning ḥadīth. I will go to Sana'a and attend the shaykh's lectures there." After the ḥajj was over, he journeyed to Sana'a and listened to the ḥadīths handed down through Zuhrī and Ibn al-Musayyab from ʿAbd al-Razzāq.[1]

In due time, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal acquired a high reputation for his profound knowledge, particularly his scholarship with respect to the precepts, actions, and sayings of the Messenger ﷺ, of which he could relate over a million. Despite his vast knowledge and prodigious memory, he had a high regard for Shāfiʿī's intelligence, grasp, and deductive method of reasoning. He used to say of Shāfiʿī, "I have not seen anyone like him." Aḥmad learned the rules of jurisprudence from Shāfiʿī and later developed his own doctrine of uncompromising adherence to the text of the ḥadīths as a source of law. Ultimately, he rose to be an eminent theologian and jurist, and the founder of one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, which still has adherents in many parts of the Islamic world. Shāfiʿī, too, held Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in high regard. Upon leaving Baghdad, Shāfiʿī remarked, "I am leaving Baghdad when there is no jurist more pious or greater than Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal."[2]

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal began his discourses on ḥadīth in approximately 204/819, at age forty. Perhaps this was ordained by Allāh as an echo of the Messenger's call to Islam, since he ﷺ was graced with prophecy at the same age.[3] Aḥmad's lectures were quite popular and widely attended. Historians report that five thousand or more persons attended his lectures, out of which about five hundred used to take down his discourses. People listened to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in pin-drop silence, for nobody would dare talk or do anything unseemly, out of respect for the ḥadīth.

The poor were given preference over the rich in his lectures. Dhahabī quotes the following from Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī (d. 275/888), a contemporary (and student) of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal:

> I have not seen the poor and lowly shown more deference anywhere than in the lectures of Abū ʿAbdillāh [Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal], who used to be attentive to

1 Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 10:326–27; *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad*, 69–70.

2 *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 16.

3 Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, 33.

> the poor and indifferent to the affluent. He was a man of ample forbearance, and never hasty; he displayed great humility and tranquility, and sublimity hovered over him. After ʿaṣr prayer, he used to arrive for his gatherings in which legal rulings were offered, but would remain silent until he was asked.[1]

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was extremely simple in his habits and led an almost ascetic life like the saints of the past. He never accepted any gift or present offered by caliphs or nobles. If his sons ever asked why he refused these presents, he explained that the offerings were perfectly lawful and that even ḥajj could be performed from such money. He refused to accept these gifts not because they were prohibited, but because prudence dictated so. He managed to meet his expenses from the income of his family inheritance or from his own earnings, but despite being financially hard-pressed he was big-hearted and generous. He often said that if the entire world became a morsel in the hands of any Muslim who fed another Muslim with it, such would not be extravagance.

He was not only charitable with wealth, but exhibited the same virtue even where his own person was concerned. Once a man abused and denounced him but soon came back to repent and offer his apology. Aḥmad replied that he had already forgiven the man before leaving the place of the incident. After enduring torture for his stance on the eternality of the Qur'ān, he forgave all who had a hand in his suffering, including the caliph, under whose orders he had been brutally flogged. He used to say, "I cannot pardon the innovator in religion, but aside from him, everyone who took part in my victimization has been pardoned by me." Often he said, "What advantage would anyone derive if a Muslim were scourged in Hellfire because of me?"

An incident illustrating the overflowing charity and good-natured disposition of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal has been related by Aḥmad al-Qaṭṭān al-Baghdādī. He says that long after the wounds inflicted by the flogging had healed, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal often suffered a shooting pain in his back caused by a growth which developed as a result of the severe whipping. The physician who had treated Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal told Baghdādī that when he pressed the spot where Aḥmad had pain, he simply said, "I seek the refuge of Allāh from it." Similarly, when the physician opened the spot to remove the wound, Aḥmad continued to seek forgiveness for Muʿtaṣim till the operation was over. After dressing the wound the physician asked Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, "Abū ʿAbdillāh, when people have to face a calamity on someone else's account, they normally

1 *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 35; Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 9:165.

curse the tormenter, but you were invoking divine blessings for Muʿtaṣim?" "I too thought of it," replied Aḥmad, "but Muʿtaṣim is a descendant of the Prophet's uncle, and I do not cherish the thought of a feud with one of the relatives of the Prophet ﷺ when I face him on the Day of Judgment. So I decided to forgo my claim against him."[1]

Despite his high reputation and profound knowledge, he was never heard to utter a word of self-praise. One of his colleagues, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, said, "I have not seen a man like Aḥmad. I had been associated with him for fifty years, but he never showed off his erudition."[2]

Out of modesty Aḥmad never liked to mention his lineage, even though he descended from a celebrated Arab tribe, something that was considered a great honor in those days. Dhahabī records an incident, related by one of Aḥmad's compatriots, that throws light on his remarkable humility: ʿĀrim Abū Nuʿmān says, "Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal had asked me to keep safe some funds from which he would withdraw sums according to his needs. Once I said, 'Abū ʿAbdillāh, I know you are an Arab.' To this he replied, 'What? We are destitute.' I insisted on a reply but he evaded the answer.[3]

After the persecution Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal had to undergo for his stand on the question of the createdness of the Qur'ān, he obtained so high a reputation for his piety that countless people offered prayers for divine blessings on him. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, however, felt terribly worried and uncertain. Once Marrūdhī told him, "A large number of people solemnly pray for you." "How do you say so?" Aḥmad exclaimed; "I actually fear that this is just delusion." Marrūdhī replied, "A man has come from Tarsus who says that he was present on a battlefield in Byzantine lands, when suddenly in the pitch dark of night, he heard cries raised at every turn and from every quarter imploring for supplication in your favor. He further relates that the soldiers fired the ballista on your behalf; and once it so happened, that when a ballista head was thus fired, the missile hit an enemy taking position behind a cover on the wall of the fort, cleanly blowing away both the cover and the head of the enemy." Horrified on hearing this, Aḥmad exclaimed, "O Allāh, let this not be a deluding favor from You."[4]

Very often non-Muslims came to meet him from distant places. A Christian physician once visited him in connection with his treatment. He said, "I have

1 Ibn Ḥibbān, *Rawḍat al-ʿUqalā'*, 156–57.
2 *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 9:181.
3 *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 22.
4 Ibid., 21.

wanted to meet you for a long time. You are a blessing not for the Muslims alone but for all people. All of our friends and co-religionists have similar feelings for you." When the physician had left, Marrūdhī said, "I hope that the entire Muslim world shall beseech divine blessings for you." Aḥmad, however, replied, "When a man happens to know his worth, then regardless of what anyone says, nothing can delude him."[1]

His profound humility notwithstanding, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was endowed with a personality so solemn and impressive that even state officials, administrators, and soldiers felt overawed in his presence and could not help paying him due respect. An eyewitness reports that he had been to the governor of Baghdad, Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm, and several other high-ranking officials, but did not find anyone so commanding as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. He says that he wanted to seek certain clarifications from Aḥmad, but found himself in a flutter: the blood knocking in his temples, he was unable to speak in Aḥmad's presence. The reputed ḥadīth scholar Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898) says:

> I have seen Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. It seemed as if his heart was a repository of all the knowledge vouchsafed to human beings, past and present; he brought forth whatever he wanted and held back what he did not desire to divulge.[2]

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal led a life so simple and frugal that it was envied even by the ascetics. The reign of the first three Abbasid sovereigns of his time, Ma'mūn, Muʿtaṣim , and Wāthiq, constituted a trial for Aḥmad, since each of these men was bent on putting him to harm. Wāthiq was succeeded in 232/846 by Mutawakkil, who held Aḥmad in high esteem, but Aḥmad was far more wary of Mutawakkil because he took the favors of the caliph as a temptation to evil. He often said that he was able to withstand the sufferings inflicted by the earlier caliphs, but in his old age, he had to face a trial far severer. However, the respect and deference and the favors and gifts of Mutawakkil could not make inroads into the contentment and resignation of Aḥmad, just as the threats and suffering at the hands of earlier caliphs had failed to deter him from the path enjoined by the Sunna of the Prophet.

Once, Mutawakkil sent Aḥmad a donkey's load of gold pieces, but he refused to accept them. The man who had brought the present insisted he accept the money and implored that the caliph could take offence if the present was refused. At last Aḥmad consented to letting the bag be placed

1 Ibid., 21–22.

2 Ibid., 16; *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad*, 15.

in a corner. Aḥmad, however, called on his uncle late in the night and asked his advice as to what he should do with the money. He deeply regretted that he had accepted the present and could not sleep on account of it. His uncle advised him to wait at least until daybreak and then to dispose it of in the manner he liked best. Early the next morning, Aḥmad collected his trusted disciples and associates and asked them to prepare a list of righteous persons that were not well-known. He distributed the entire sum and then gave the bag to a destitute man.[1]

On another occasion, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal spent a few days as a royal guest on the insistence of Caliph Mutawakkil. During this period he was served sumptuous dishes, which were estimated to cost 120 dirhams per day. Aḥmad, however, did not touch the food and kept fasting continuously for eight days. He grew very weak, and it is reported that if the caliph had not sent him home soon thereafter, he would have probably died.[2] ʿAbdullāh, Aḥmad's son, says that his father remained with the caliph for sixteen days. During this period he took only a little parched grain reduced into paste.

Mutawakkil had sanctioned stipends for the sons of Aḥmad. One of his sons reports that prior to their receiving these stipends from the caliph, Aḥmad had no objection to accepting anything from his sons, but he completely discontinued the practice thereafter. Once, when Aḥmad was ill, a physician prescribed him water extracted from a parched pumpkin. Aḥmad was advised by someone to have the pumpkin parched in the oven of his son Ṣāliḥ, which happened to be burning at the time, but Aḥmad refused.[3] Although he was extremely cautious with regard to his own self, he still felt uneasy about the stipends received by his sons, and ultimately told Ṣāliḥ, "I want that you should forsake the allowance, for you are getting it on account of me."

Aḥmad fell seriously ill at age seventy-seven. The number of people who came to see him every day was so large, according to the chroniclers of his time, that all the streets of the bazaar near his house were overcrowded, and police had to be stationed there to control the traffic.[4] Aḥmad was suffering from blood in the urine (hematuria), and the reason for his illness given by physicians was that grief and anxiety had produced an ulcer in his stomach.[5]

1 *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 60.
2 Ibid., 61.
3 Ibid., 63–64.
4 Ibid., 77.
5 Ibid., 77.

Marrūdhī says that Aḥmad's condition deteriorated on a Thursday. Although he was in unbearable pain, Aḥmad asked Marrūdhī to help him perform the ablution. He was so particular about his ablution that he instructed Marrūdhī to pass his fingers between his toes. On the evening of Friday, Aḥmad's illness grew still worse and he died the next day, Friday 12 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 241 (31 July 855).[1]

Dispute over the Createdness of the Qur'ān

Caliph Ma'mūn applied himself vigorously to the task of spreading the Muʿtazilī doctrine about the nature of the Qur'ān, which held that it was the created, rather than eternal, word of Allāh. In Ma'mūn's judgment, any deviation from this doctrine was worse than treason. Therefore, in 218/833 he issued a detailed mandate to the governor of Baghdad severely criticizing the populace, particularly the ḥadīth scholars. He described them as noisy and turbulent sectarians lacking true faith, unreliable witnesses and reactionaries of the Umma. He ordered all officials dismissed who did not subscribe to the tenets he upheld regarding the Qur'ān.[2] The royal edict came four months before Ma'mūn's death. Copies were dispatched to the governors of all provinces, who were instructed to summon the leading scholars and jurists under the employ of the state in order to test them in the fundamentals of the doctrine. Those who did not accept the Muʿtazilī view were to be dismissed.

Thereafter, Ma'mūn issued another order to the governor of Baghdad asking him to present before him seven reputed ḥadīth scholars of the city who were opposed to the doctrine.[3] When they came, Ma'mūn questioned them about their beliefs regarding the createdness of the Qur'ān. Each of them, either out of conviction or expediency, expressed agreement with the caliph's views or was allowed to return home. They were also asked to profess their views in public meetings convened for this purpose, but the masses remained unmoved and held fast to the orthodox view.

A few days before his death, Ma'mūn issued a third edict to Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm (governor of Baghdad), expounding his doctrine in still greater detail and enlarging its scope to test all the scholars of religion along with the officials of the state. He made it compulsory for everyone to subscribe to the tenets of the Muʿtazilī ideology. Isḥāq convened a meeting of all the

1 Ibid., 76; Bukhārī, *Al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, 2:6; *Al-Tārīkh al-Ṣaghīr*, 244.

2 Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam*, 10:284–93; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdād*, 181–86.

3 *Kitāb Baghdād* 183.

reputed scholars, asked their views about the state doctrine, and reported their answers back to the caliph. Ma'mūn fell into tantrums on reading Isḥāq's letter of reply. He ordered that the persons reported by Isḥāq, Bishr ibn al-Walīd and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, be executed, and that the rest, those who still held fast to their views, be sent to him in chains.

Now only four of the remaining thirty scholars, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ḥasan ibn Ḥammāḍ al-Sajjāda, ʿUbaydullāh ibn ʿUmar al-Qawārīrī, and Muḥammad ibn Nūḥ, remained adamant about their beliefs and were thrown in prison. Sajjāda went back on his stance the next day and Qawārīrī on the third. Only Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Muḥammad ibn Nūḥ upheld their views and were sent to be presented before the caliph in Tarsus. Along with these two were nineteen other learned individuals who had refused to accept the Qur'ān as created. By the time the prisoners reached Raqqa, Ma'mūn had died and they were sent back to the governor of Baghdad. Muḥammad ibn Nūḥ died on the way, and Aḥmad and the other prisoners were taken back to Baghdad.

A few days before his death, Ma'mūn nominated his brother Abū Muḥammad, who took the title Al-Muʿtaṣim bi-'Llāh, as successor to the caliphate. He was instructed to follow faithfully in the footsteps of his predecessor, especially in the controversy relating to the nature and creation of the Qur'ān, and also to retain Ibn Abī Dāwūd as chief justice and his principal adviser. Muʿtaṣim vigorously pursued the policy laid down for his guidance by his predecessor.

Calamity Befalls Aḥmad

Now, the responsibility of defending the orthodox view and opposing the Muʿtazilī heresy about the Qur'ān fell to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, a man held in high esteem for his profound knowledge of ḥadīth and looked upon as a trustee of the true faith as enjoined by the Qur'ān and the Sunna.

When Aḥmad arrived at Baghdad from Raqqa, he wore four iron shackles on his legs. He was cross-examined for four days but would not recant his views. On the fourth day, Aḥmad was brought before the governor, who implored him to accept the doctrine of the Muʿtazilīs. He told Aḥmad that the caliph had taken a vow that he would not execute him but would instead have him most severely beaten and confined in a dungeon where the sun never rose. But Aḥmad did not yield and was ultimately brought before Muʿtaṣim. The caliph ordered Aḥmad be given twenty-eight lashes. A fresh executioner was brought after every two strokes, but still after each stroke, Aḥmad said, "Bring something to me from the Qur'ān or the Sunna for me to accept it."

Aḥmad's Account of His Sufferings

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal has given a personal account of his sufferings:

> When I reached the place known as the Bustān Gate, a horse was brought before me and I was told to get on. Nobody helped me mount the horse, and with heavy chains fastened to my legs, I had to make many attempts. I barely managed somehow to save myself from falling down on my face in these attempts. When I reached Muʿtaṣim's palace, I was thrown in a small room which was bolted shut. There was no lamp in the room, and in the middle of the night, when I stretched my hands to touch the dust for purification before the prayers I intended to offer, I found a tumbler full of water and a basin. I performed ablution and offered the prayers. On the next day a page took me before the caliph. The chief justice, Ibn Abī Dāwūd, and a number of his courtiers, along with Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shāfiʿī, were present there. Just before I was brought before the caliph, two persons were beheaded. I asked Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shāfiʿī if he remembered what Imām Shāfiʿī had said about *tayammum*.[1] On this Ibn Abī Dāwūd remarked, "Look here! This man is about to be beheaded and he is making legal inquiries." In the meantime, Muʿtaṣim asked me to come forward. I reached quite close to him and he told me to sit down. I was very tired because of the heavy chains on my body.
>
> After I had taken rest for a while I requested of the caliph permission to ask something. The caliph granted me permission to pose the question, so I asked, "I want to know, what was it to which the Prophet of Allāh summoned us?" The caliph was silent a few seconds and then replied, "To bear witness that there is no god save Allāh." "I bear witness to this," I said, and continued, "Your great-grandfather, Ibn ʿAbbās, has narrated that when the deputation of ʿAbd al-Qays[2] came to the Prophet ﷺ, they enquired about the contents of the faith. The Prophet ﷺ asked, "Do you know its reality?" They replied, "Verily, Allāh and His Prophet know best." Thereafter the Prophet ﷺ explained, "It consists of bearing witness that there is no god save Allāh and that Muḥammad is His Messenger, offering prayers, giving of alms, and remitting one-fifth of the spoils of war to the state." "I would not have interfered with you if my predecessor had not laid his hands on you," said the caliph. Then, turning to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Isḥāq, he remarked, "Didn't I order you to give up this affair?" I said, "Allāh is Great! It is a blessing unto the Muslims."

1 Ritual purification with dust in place of water for offering prayers when water is not available or is harmful for one's health.

2 An Arab tribe.

The caliph then asked the scholars, including ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, to join in debate with me. . . . [Imām Aḥmad recounted the details of the debate at this point.]. . . . I answered the questions of all, one by one, until Muʿtaṣim exclaimed, "Aḥmad! Allāh may have mercy on you. Think again of what you say." To this I answered, "O Leader of the Faithful, show me something in the Qur'ān or the Sunna and I will accept what you say." Often he remarked, "If he could simply say yes to me, I would set him free with my own hands and then call upon him with my nobles and army chiefs."

Once he intervened to say, "Aḥmad, I feel compassion for you and love you as much as my own son, Hārūn. What do you say?" My reply to all such entreaties was, "I will accept if you can bring forth something from the Book of Allāh or the Sunna of the Prophet ﷺ." At last the caliph got tired and called off the session. I was sent back to the room of my confinement. The next day the debate went on till late in the afternoon, when the caliph ordered to suspend the debate again.

On the third day, I asked for a cord to fasten my chains, for I had a premonition that something would happen on that day. I also fastened my trousers securely lest I should become unclothed in the hour of crisis. When I arrived at the court, I found the dignitaries of the empire ranged on the right and left of the caliph's seat, hundreds of men in splendid uniforms, some with drawn swords and others with whips standing round the caliph. But a number of religious scholars present on the previous two days were absent. When I reached near Muʿtaṣim, he ordered me to sit down and to contend with the people present there. I answered the questions they asked till it got late and I was taken aside. The caliph said something to them, who left the court, and I was again brought before Muʿtaṣim. He said, "Aḥmad, may Allāh have mercy on you. Accept what I say and I will set you free with my own hands."[1] I gave the earlier answer, to which he now grew angry and ordered, "Take hold of his arms and dislocate them." After this, Muʿtaṣim sat down on a chair near me and called the executioners. Each man gave me two lashes while the caliph bade them give a harder stripe. After I took nineteen lashes, Muʿtaṣim addressed me again and said, "Aḥmad, why do you want to get rid of your life? Allāh knows that I have a great regard for you."

One general, ʿUjayf [ibn ʿAnbasa] struck me with the hilt of his sword and exclaimed, "You want to overcome them all." Another man remarked, "Don't

1 The historians of the time report that Muʿtaṣim wanted to set Aḥmad free, but Ibn Abī Dāwūd exhorted him and said that if the Caliph forgave Aḥmad, his action would be construed as going back on the policy laid down by his brother.

you see that the caliph is standing before you?" A third exclaimed, "Leader of the Faithful, you are fasting and standing in the sun." Muʿtaṣim repeatedly beseeched me to acknowledge his doctrine, but each time I repeated my earlier reply, at which he flared up and ordered me scourged harder till I fell unconscious. When I came to, I found that I had been unchained. Someone present there told me, "We pulled you down on your face and then trampled upon you." However, I do not know what they had done to me.[1]

Steadfastness of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was thereafter sent back to his house. He spent twenty-eight months in prison and suffered thirty-four lashes. Ibrāhīm ibn Muṣʿab, one of the guards in whose custody Aḥmad was kept, says that he had not seen anyone more courageous and brave than Aḥmad, for he regarded his guards as though they were mere insects. Another person, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Abī Samīna (d. 230/845), says that he had heard from certain eye-witnesses that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was scourged so severely that one stroke would have sufficed to make an elephant cry out. Another eyewitness of Aḥmad's scourging said that since Aḥmad was fasting on that day, he said to him, "The Sharīʿa permits you to outwardly accept the doctrine of the caliph to save your life." But Aḥmad paid me no attention. When he became too thirsty, he asked for some water. A tumbler of ice-cold water was brought, which he took in his hand, but then returned.[2]

One of the sons of Aḥmad relates that his father had lash marks on his body when he died. Abū 'l-ʿAbbās al-Raqqī describes how certain people who wanted to save Aḥmad from his sufferings went to the prison in Raqqa where he was confined and recited the ḥadīths that allows one placed in similar circumstances to save his life. Aḥmad replied, "But what do you say of the ḥadīth transmitted by Khabbāb which says that there were people of old who were sawed into two but did not renounce their faith?" Those people became despondent with Aḥmad's reply, for they realized that he would go through every possible trial and tribulation for the sake of his faith.

Achievements of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

The undaunted courage and steadfastness of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal lent a death blow to a heresy which had presented a grave threat to the true faith. All those scholars who had expressed their agreement with the views of the

1 *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 41–49 (summarized).

2 Ibid., 49–50 (summarized).

caliphate, either out of fear or expediency, were exposed. All such individuals were despised and held in contempt, despite their erudition and learning. On the other hand, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was received by the people with the most honorable marks of distinction, and affection for him became a sign of adherence to the orthodox school of Islam. One of his contemporaries, Ibn Qutayba, said, "When you find a person who loves Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, you should know that he is a follower of the Sunna."[1] Another scholar, Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Dawraqī, cautioned, "Be suspicious of the faith of one whom you find irreverent to Aḥmad."[2]

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was highly esteemed for his outstanding erudition in the science of ḥadīth. The compilation of the *Musnad* by Aḥmad is truly a testament to his profound knowledge. Aḥmad was also a theologian and an eminent jurist, the founder of one of the four orthodox schools of Islamic jurisprudence. He led the life of a pious ascetic, but despite all these qualities, the reason for his reputation of distinction and the affection with which he was received by the Umma lay in his fearless championship of the true faith in the face of the most powerful empire of his time. It is this achievement of Aḥmad which shall ever keep him endeared to the faithful, as a poet has said:

> Ibrāhīm was reputed not for raising the House of Allāh;
> For he was quite at ease in the flaming fire, was he famed.

All the contemporaries of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who witnessed the calamity of the dispute at its height have handsomely acknowledged his unrivalled achievement. A contemporary of Aḥmad and ḥadīth scholar of repute, ʿAlī ibn al-Madīnī,[3] acknowledged that

> Allāh Almighty has honored this religion through two persons for whom there is no third: one was Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq on the occasion of the apostasy, and the other was Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal during the inquisition.[4]

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal obtained so high a reputation and acceptance that when he died in 241/855 the whole of Baghdad came out to pay homage to the departed teacher. The city had never witnessed such a surging crowd. His funeral was attended approximately by 800,000 men and 60,000 women.[5]

1 Ibid., 16.
2 Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 4:420.
3 He was the teacher of the great ḥadīth scholar, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī.
4 *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 4:418.
5 *Tarjamat al-Imām*, 80; *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 1:48.

CHAPTER 5

Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashᶜarī

The Crisis of Muᶜtazilism

The Muᶜtazilīs suffered a severe setback after the deaths of Muᶜtaṣim and Wāthiq, both of whom were ardent supporters of Muᶜtazilī doctrine. Mutawakkil the tenth Abbasid caliph, succeeded his brother Wāthiq in 232/846. An opponent of the Muᶜtazilīs, he was eager to restore the true conception of religion. He condemned the allegedly free-thinking Muᶜtazilīs as heretics, expelled them from public office, and prohibited them from holding discussions on religious questions. Nevertheless, Muᶜtazilism had taken root in the circles of the learned and the philosophers all over the Islamic world.

Although the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān had died out, Muᶜtazilī thought still exercised considerable influence. It continued to enjoy a vigorous following owing to the prominent exponents of Muᶜtazilism, who were well-versed in literature, dialectics, jurisprudence, and other sciences, and who held high state offices. Muᶜtazilīs gained dominance by the middle of the third/ninth century, when they were commonly regarded as rationalistic, progressive thinkers and seekers of the truth. Muᶜtazilism became the fashion among young men, students, and others who wanted to make a name for themselves.

The Ḥanbalī school was unable to produce another scholar of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's caliber, while the ḥadīth scholars and the teachers of the orthodox school came to regard secular sciences as unwanted intruders into the domain of religion. The orthodox theologians' ignorance of dialectics and other secular sciences was seen as their weakness, allowing Muᶜtazilīs to gain a supremacy unseen before or since. It is true that those who had a profound knowledge of religious sciences had generally accepted the tenets of the ḥadīth scholars, but the uninformed masses were mostly swayed by the sharp wit and artfully discursive reasoning exhibited by the Muᶜtazilīs.

Many theologians also suffered from an inferiority complex that served to attract minds not content with the formalism of the orthodox school toward the Muʿtazilī view. This posed a great danger indeed for the Sharīʿa and the path trodden by the scholars of the past.

The rationalists, holding the view that human reason was sufficiently competent to search for ultimate reality, explained away any passages of the Qur'ān that they did not find supportive of their mode of reasoning. Their explanations undermined the religion and its fundamental tenets. Thus, an alleged rationalism lacking in scholarship and wisdom gained ground among the Muslims and could not be refuted successfully by the unflinching faith and ardent zeal of the Ḥanbalīs and ḥadīth scholars, nor by the spiritual excellence and asceticism of the pious, nor even by the analogical deduction and elaborate canonical laws and rules of the jurists.

The Man Demanded by the Faith

The crisis demanded a scholar, profound in knowledge and well-versed in the secular sciences, who could fight the Muʿtazilīs with their own weapons. He had to be a man of towering personality, unrivalled even by the most prominent exponents of Muʿtazilī thought. This was exactly the type of man that Islam received in the person of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī.

Imām Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī

Born in Basra in 260/874, Abū 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl was descended from Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, a Companion of the Messenger ﷺ. After Ismāʿīl's death, Abū 'l-Ḥasan's mother married Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 302/915), who was the last great teacher and ardent promoter of Muʿtazilism. Ashʿarī was brought up and educated by Jubbā'ī, growing up to become an adherent of the Muʿtazilī doctrine and a trusted assistant to Jubbā'ī.

Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī was a successful teacher and writer but not a good debater, while Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī was celebrated for both his wit and his eloquence. During the debates on the doctrines of Muʿtazilism, Jubbā'ī used to ask his stepson to contend with the opponents of his school. Ashʿarī quickly made a name for himself through his mastery of debate, and was recognized as a teacher of the Muʿtazilī school.[1] It was expected that he would succeed his stepfather and mentor as an even more vigorous and distinguished exponent of Muʿtazilī doctrine. Allāh, however, willed otherwise.

1 Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī*, p. 117.

Despite the fact that Ashᶜarī had spent his life in the advocacy of the Muᶜtazilī school, whose leadership was about to fall in his lap, Allāh selected him to vindicate the Sunna. He began to see through the intellectual sophistry of the Muᶜtazilī school, its quibbling and hairsplitting, and ultimately realized that the false reasoning of the rationalists was nothing more than an empty but well-argued spell of words, ideas, and thoughts that were wholly inconsequential to the search for Truth. It dawned on Ashᶜarī that the source of truth lay only in revelation: the way of the teachers of the old and Companions of the Messenger ﷺ was the only right path, and that there was no reason why intellect should not submit to it. Thus, becoming disenchanted with the Muᶜtazilī doctrines at the age of forty, he developed an intense dislike for the so-called rationalist school. He went into his house and did not come out for fifteen days. On the sixteenth day, he went from his house to the principal mosque of the city. It was Friday, so Ashᶜarī elbowed his way through the throngs of the faithful, went straight to the pulpit, and as he ascended its steps he began to proclaim:

> Many of you know me. I want to tell those who do not know me that I am Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashᶜarī. I was a Muᶜtazilī and believed in their doctrines. Now I seek repentance from Allāh and turn away from my earlier beliefs. Henceforth, I shall endeavor to refute the doctrines of the Muᶜtazilīs and lay bare their mistakes and weaknesses.[1]

From that day on, Ashᶜarī fully devoted himself to repudiating the Muᶜtazilīs and propounding the tenets of orthodox Islam. With his profound knowledge, penetrating intellect, eloquence, mastery of debate, and gifted writing, he overpowered his opponents and upheld orthodox doctrines.

Ashᶜarī's Zeal to Propagate and Establish the Truth

As he considered it an obligation and mission enjoined by Allāh the Almighty, Ashᶜarī tirelessly undertook the task with zeal. Attending the meetings of the Muᶜtazilīs, he sought out rationalists, to set their doubts about orthodoxy to rest. If anyone objected to his meeting with skeptics and dissenters, who ought to rather be shunned, he replied that he could not do otherwise, as the Muᶜtazilīs were all well-placed in life, held the offices of administrators, judges, and other venerable positions and, therefore, could not be expected to come to him. If he too were to sit with folded hands, how would they come

1 *Tabyīn*, 39–40; *Wafayāt al-Aᶜyān*, 2:446–447.

to know the truth? He was someone who could defend the religion through reason and disputation.[1]

The Achievements of Ashʿarī

Ashʿarī was already a master of deduction and debate. He contended for the correct doctrine with aptitude and skill. No one was better qualified than he; with his knowledge of sciences like logic and debate, he excelled over Muʿtazilī scholars and rebutted their objections like a teacher answering the questions of his students. One of his disciples, Abū ʿAbdillāh ibn al-Khafīf left an account of his first meeting with Ashʿarī in these words:

> I came from Shiraz to Basra. Keen to meet Ashʿarī, I enquired of his address. I went to his place as he attended a debate. A group of Muʿtazilīs were blurting out questions one after another. After they all finished their haranguing, Ashʿarī began his response. He took the objections raised by each man, one by one, and set to rest all of their doubts. When Ashʿarī rose from the meeting, I followed him. He asked, "What do you want?" I replied, "I want to see how many eyes, ears and tongues you have." He smiled on hearing my answer.[2]

The same narrator continues:

> "I couldn't see why you kept quiet in the beginning," I said, "and allowed the Muʿtazilīs to present their objections. It behooved you to deliver lectures and meet their objections forthwith, instead of asking them to speak first." Ashʿarī replied, "I do not consider it lawful even to repeat their doctrines and beliefs, but once someone has expressed them, it becomes an obligation for the righteous to refute their tenets."[3]

Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī was the founder of scholastic theology (*kalām*). All the theologians of the later ages have acknowledged Ashʿarī's God-given intelligence, wisdom, discernment, and insightfulness. Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī was known to his contemporaries by the name of *Lisān al-Umma* (Tongue of the Nation) on account of his eloquence and skill with the pen. Once, when somebody remarked that his writings appeared to excel those of Ashʿarī, Bāqillānī replied that he considered it an honor just to be able to understand Ashʿarī's works.[4] Another celebrated scholar, Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarāyīnī, who

1 *Tabyīn*, 116.
2 Ibid., 95.
3 Ibid., 95–95.
4 Ibid., 126.

is considered an authority on theology and legal theory, admitted that his own knowledge was like a drop in an ocean compared to that of Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī, a student of Ashʿarī, while the same similitude applied to Bāhilī's knowledge compared to the knowledge of his master.[1]

The Middle Course of Ashʿarī

Ashʿarī adopted a middle course between the Muʿtazilīs and the ḥadīth scholars. Unlike the Muʿtazilīs, he rejected the claim that reason was completely sufficient to discern metaphysical realities and deliver a verdict about the content, nature, attributes, and characteristics of Ultimate Truth. He disagreed with the Ḥanbalīs and ḥadīth scholars who, owing to their fervor for the faith, considered it necessary to sneer and turn their backs on using reason in defense of religion. He did not consider it prudent to remain silent about contentious and dogmatic issues raised during his time. He employed philosophical terminology in his discussions with the Muʿtazilīs and the scholars of the rationalist school, which heightened their respect for orthodoxy. In fact, Ashʿarī followed the maxim "talk to the people according to their understanding." This meant keeping the laity in view as much as the elite.

Since the Muʿtazilīs followed their own instincts and desires by explaining away the dictates of religion, preferring the doctrines propagated by the expounders of their sect over the tenets of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, Ashʿarī criticized them with the utmost emphasis at his command. In the first treatise he wrote after turning away from Muʿtazilism, he explained:

> It ought to be known that these sects (the Muʿtazilīs and the Qadarīs) have, in falling behind the forerunners and leaders of their sects, turned away from the Right Path and submitted to their own wishes and desires. They have explained away the Qur'ānic text in a way unauthorized by Allāh Almighty. Their interpretation is neither supported by reason nor by the ḥadīth handed down from the Messenger ﷺ, his Companions, or their Successors.[2]

Thereafter, throwing light on the principles of his own school of thought, he said:

> We have a faith in the Qur'ān and the ḥadīths and, therefore, hold the opinion that these must be followed ungrudgingly. What has been handed down by the Companions, their Successors, and the ḥadīth scholars has to be accepted

1 Ibid., 125.

2 Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Ibāna*, 5.

completely and with unquestioning submission, for this is the way of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (may Allāh bless him and give him a goodly reward by raising him to a high and sublime station). We shun those who do not follow the path of Aḥmad, for he was the imām, pious and erudite, whom Allāh Almighty enabled to show the path of righteousness and efface the deviations, innovations, and doubts of the skeptics, and the interpretations of the misguided. May Allāh glorify the admirable and venerable Imām."[1]

The achievements of Ashʿarī did not, however, simply consist of defending the orthodox school, for the Ḥanbalīs and other ḥadīth scholars had already undertaken that. The most valuable accomplishment of Ashʿarī was the formulation of principles which enabled the tenets of orthodoxy to be accepted in the light of reason, on the basis of logical arguments. He examined the doctrines of the Muʿtazilīs and other sects through the principles of logic and the philosophical terminology formulated by those very sects, and brought out their mistakes so as to uphold the beliefs and tenets of the orthodoxy.

Ashʿarī inevitably earned the displeasure of the Muʿtazilīs and other opposing sects, and he was also criticized by rigid Ḥanbalīs and ḥadīth scholars who considered it a sin to discuss the issues raised by the rationalists or to use philosophical terms to clarify the tenets of the faith.

Ashʿarī maintained that the ultimate source of faith and the key to metaphysical and unseen realities were revelation and the teachings of the Messenger ﷺ rather than human reason, speculation, or Greek metaphysics. At the same time, he differed from the rigid dogmatism of conformists, who thought it prudent to remain silent about issues raised by opposing sects simply because the ḥadīths transmitted from the Messenger ﷺ did not employ their terminology. Ashʿarī felt that this attitude would be regarded as a weakness of the orthodox school, ultimately harming it. He also maintained that the attitude of rigid dogmatists would enable the Muʿtazilīs and other opposing sects, through their apparent endeavor to reconcile faith with reason and religion with philosophy, to attract intellectual youth who were not content being pushed into such a rigid mold.

Ashʿarī agreed with the orthodox view that revelation and prophecy were the only dependable sources as far as the religion was concerned, a view diametrically opposed to the Muʿtazilīs and the philosophers. However, he also held that it was not only lawful but obligatory and even a superior form of *jihād*, to utilize logical deduction and the prevailing philosophical terminol-

1 Ibid., 8.

ogy to clarify religious doctrines. He maintained that it was not at all necessary to avoid issues pertaining to perception and intellect, which were ultimately grounded in human experience but had been needlessly incorporated into religious doctrines by the rationalists to argue about them with the help of clever wordplay. At the same time, he considered it essential for teachers of religion to face those issues and refute the claims of the Muʿtazilīs and other philosophers through logic and reason. He did not subscribe to the view that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ made no mention of the issues raised by the rationalists of later times, either on account of his ignorance or because he did not consider it lawful to do so. This was simply because those questions and rationalistic modes of thought had not come into existence during the lifetime of the Messenger ﷺ.

Ashʿarī maintained that, just as new issues in sacred and secular law were being brought to light by the changing times, new questions in the realm of doctrines and metaphysics were also being raised. Therefore, like jurists who solved difficult legal questions through analogical deduction and elaborating canon laws, the theologians and the scholars of religion were duty-bound to explain and clarify the tenets of faith in the face of new questions. Ashʿarī wrote a treatise entitled *Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fi 'l-Kalām* (Praiseworthiness of Inquiry in Theology) explaining his opinion on the matter.

Thus, disregarding both the satisfaction or opposition of either faction, Ashʿarī went ahead with the task of defending the religion according to the methodology he deemed necessary. This endeavor undoubtedly required great courage and intelligence, and Ashʿarī met the challenge. Through his lectures and writings, he was able to quell the rising tide of Muʿtazilism and philosophy, saving many souls from being swept away by the wave of skepticism. He instilled faith, enthusiasm, zeal, and self-confidence among the followers of orthodoxy through his well-argued and forceful vindication of the religion. Ashʿarī's defense was, however, not the least apologetic. On the contrary, he was able to eradicate the inferiority complex that had unconsciously seized the followers of the orthodox creed and insidiously undermined their self-confidence. Ashʿarī quickly turned the tables on the Muʿtazilīs who, far from maintaining the force of their assault on orthodoxy, found it difficult to withstand Ashʿarī's offensive, which he delivered with the full weight of an unshakable conviction. Abū Bakr ibn al-Ṣayrafī says that the Muʿtazilīs had caused a crisis for Islam, but Allāh brought forth Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī to take up the bludgeons against them. He overcame them with intelligence and debate. Therefore, he soon came to be regarded as one

of the foremost advocates and revivers of the religion. Certain scholars, like Abū Bakr al-Ismāʿīlī, hold him as second only to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal for his efforts to uphold and defend the religion.[1]

Ashʿarī's Works

Ashʿarī defended orthodox Islam not only with his sermons and debates, but also through valuable treatises he wrote to expose the weaknesses of heretical sects. Dhahabī reports that Ashʿarī's commentary on the Qur'ān ran into thirty volumes. Ashʿarī is said to have written some 250 to 300 works, a large number of which deal with the main positions of the Muʿtazilīs and other unorthodox philosophies and heretical religion.[2] A voluminous work by Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Fuṣūl* (The Book of Subsections), comprises twelve volumes, refutes the doctrines of a number of philosophies, including rationalism, atheism, and naturalism, as well as other religions such as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.[3]

Ibn Khallikān has also mentioned some of his other works entitled *Al-Lumaʿ* (The sparks), *Al-Kitāb al-Mūjaz* (The Concise Book), *Iḍāḥ al-Burhān* (Clarification of the Proof), *Al-Tabyīn ʿan Uṣūl al-Dīn* (An Exposition of the Fundamentals of Religion), and *Al-Sharḥ wa 'l-Tafṣīl* (The Detailed Exposition). Besides these works on rational sciences and theology, Ashʿarī wrote several books on other religious sciences like *Kitāb al-Qiyās* (The Book of Analogy) and *Kitāb al-Ijtihād fī 'l-Aḥkām* (The Book of Reasoning for Formulating Rulings). *Al-Khabar al-Wāḥid* (The Lone Narrator's Report) is a work refuting Ibn al-Rāwāndī's negation of *mutawātir* ḥadīths (contiguous narrations). In one of his books, entitled *Al-ʿUmad* (The Supports), Ashʿarī gives a list of sixty-eight books written by himself before 320/932, four years before his death. Some of these works run to ten or twelve volumes. Finally, the books he wrote during the last four years of his life are also considerable. His *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* (Discourses of the Proponents of Islam) demonstrates that Ashʿarī was not simply a debater, but also a reliable chronicler of other religions. In this book, he records the doctrines of a number of sects with the sense of responsibility behooving an eminent historian. In fact, his descriptions of the beliefs and practices of other religions match books written by the very followers of those faiths.[4]

1 *Tabyīn*, 53.
2 Ibid., 136.
3 Ibid., 128.
4 Ibid., 64.

Profound Knowledge and Piety

Ashʿarī was not merely an intellectual and knowledgeable scholar. Along with his excellence in reason and knowledge he was also embellished with moral and spiritual excellence, piety, and worship, as the pious predecessors were. One jurist, Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī, reported that he accompanied Ashʿarī for twenty years but did not see anyone more reverent, godly, shy, and modest in his worldly affairs, while at the same time enthusiastic in the performance of religious duties.[1] The theologian Abū 'l-Ḥusayn al-Harawī related that for years Ashʿarī spent entire nights in vigils and performed his morning prayers with the ablution he made for night prayer.[2] Ashʿarī's personal attendant, Bundār ibn al-Ḥusayn, reported that Ashʿarī's only source of livelihood consisted of a property with an income of seventeen dirhams per day, which he had inherited from his grandfather Bilāl ibn Abī Burda ibn Abī Mūsā al-Ashʿarī.[3]

Ashʿarī died in 324/936 and was buried in Baghdad. It was announced at his funeral that the "defender of ḥadīth" had passed away.

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī

During the same period, another theologian emerged in Samarkand to defend the faith against the attacks of heretical sects: Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 332/944).[4] As a result of his constant struggles with the Muʿtazilīs, Ashʿarī had become somewhat extreme in some of his views, which were stretched further by some of his followers. Māturīdī's thought, on the other hand, is marked by moderation. He rejected unwarranted additions, which had become part of the Ashʿarī school and had developed through their polemical debates with the Muʿtazilīs. They left many loopholes unfilled and many questions unanswered. Māturīdī therefore honed and reordered the fundamentals of orthodox Islamic theology, moderating it and making it more comprehensive. The differences between the Ashʿarīs and the Māturīdīs were marginal and mostly semantic and limited to thirty or forty peripheral issues.[5]

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1 Ibid., 141.

2 Ibid., 141.

3 Ibid., 142; *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 2:447.

4 This was the period when, in reaction to the Muʿtazilī attack on orthodoxy, several scholars gave attention to the development of Islamic theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) for the defense of the religion. Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933) in Egypt and Māturīdī (d. 333/944) in Samarkand took up the defense of religion, but over time the Māturīdī school became largely assimilated into the Ashʿarī school, while by comparison Ṭaḥāwī, his short creedal work notwithstanding, did not become as renowned as a theologian.

5 Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh, in his marginal gloss on the *ʿAqā'id ʿAḍudiyya*, says that the

Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī belonged to the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence. Just as most Shāfiʿī scholars and theologians followed the Ashʿarī school, the majority of Ḥanafī scholars and theologians were of the Māturīdī school. Māturīdī was also a man of letters who has left many valuable texts refuting the doctrines of the Muʿtazilīs, Rāfiḍī Shī'ites, and Qarmaṭīs. One of his books, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, is an outstanding example of his keen intellect and mastery over rational sciences. However, since Ashʿarī confronted the Muʿtazilīs in the base of their school at the center of Islamic world (Baghdad), he came to exert a far greater influence in intellectual circles and his name and works are at the forefront and enjoy greater prominence in the history of Islamic theology.

Later Ashʿarīs

The Ashʿarī school produced a number of high-ranking and respected theologians and teachers who have left an indelible mark with their profound knowledge and high intelligence. They exerted immense influence and regained supremacy for orthodoxy around the Muslim world away from the Muʿtazilīs. In the fourth/tenth century, Ashʿarī luminaries such as Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) were born. After them, in the fifth century, came Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083) and Imām al-Ḥaramayn (the Imām of the Two Sanctuaries) Abū 'l-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), who were held in high esteem due to their profound knowledge. Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī was the rector of the Niẓāmiyya College in Baghdad. He was sent by Caliph Muqtadī bi-'Llāh as his ambassador to the court of the Seljuq sultan Malikshāh. He was held in such a high esteem by the people that in whichever town he happened to pass during his journey from Baghdad to Nishapur, the entire population came out to greet him. People showered him whatever valuables they could afford and saved the dust underneath his feet out of reverence. When Shīrāzī arrived at Nishapur, the entire population came out of the city to greet him, and Imām al-Ḥaramayn himself carried Shīrāzī's saddlecloth on his shoulder as a porter's burden while escorting him. He took great pride thereafter that he had the honor of serving Shīrāzī.[1]

Imām al-Ḥaramayn was accorded the highest place of honor by Niẓām al-Mulk, the vizier of the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslan. He held the position of

disputed issues number no more than thirty (Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 184).

1 Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā*, 3:91–92.

preacher at the principal mosque of Nishapur, director of the religious trusts, and rector of the Niẓāmiyya College there. Ibn Khallikān writes of him:

> For thirty years he remained without peer in the fields of learning and piety. He was the adornment of the pulpit (*minbar*) and niche (*miḥrāb*) and the chief scholar and preacher on Friday.[1]

A historian related an incident showing the respect accorded to Imām al-Ḥaramayn. Once, the Seljuq king Malikshāh announced the appearance of the new moon at the end of Ramaḍān. Imām al-Ḥaramayn, not satisfied with the evidence, had another announcement made: "Abū 'l-Maᶜālī is satisfied that the month of Ramaḍān will continue tomorrow. All those who want to act on his decision should keep fast tomorrow also." When the king questioned Imām al-Ḥaramayn about his announcement, he said, "I am bound to obey the king in matters falling in the sphere of the state, but in matters pertaining to religion, the king ought to have asked for my decision, since under the Sharīᶜa, a religious decree carries as much authority as the edict of the king. And the matters pertaining to fast and ᶜĪd are religious issues that have nothing to do with the king. Consequently, the king had another declaration made, saying that his earlier announcement was wrong and that the people should follow the decision of Imām al-Ḥaramayn.[2]

When Imām al-Ḥaramayn died in 478/1085, the markets of Nishapur were closed, the pulpit of the principal mosque was dismantled, and four hundred of his disciples destroyed their pens and inkpots as a gesture of respect to him. The inhabitants of Nishapur received condolences and expressed their grief to one another over the death of Imām al-Ḥaramayn for one full year.[3]

Niẓām al-Mulk al-Ṭūsī, the grand vizier of the Seljuq Empire, the most powerful of the day, was himself a follower of the Ashᶜarī school. He gave great strength to the school by providing it his official backing. The founding of the two renowned educational institutions, the Niẓāmiyya colleges in Nishapur and Baghdad that were managed by Ashᶜarī scholars, provided great scholarly strength and breadth to the Ashᶜarīs. The Niẓāmiyya College in Baghdad was the largest seminary in the Muslim world and was held in great esteem. Being a student or teacher there was a source of great pride. Therefore, the influence the Ashᶜarī school had on scholars and the laity was a divine decree.

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1 *Wafayāt al-Aᶜyān*, 2:342.

2 Mullā Jalāl al-Dīn, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, 115–19.

3 *Wafayāt al-Aᶜyān*, 3:243.

CHAPTER 6

Decline of Theology & Ascendency of Hellenistic Philosophy

Philosophic and Esoteric Schools

Although the Ashʿarīs had gained ascendancy over other schools of thought by dominating the educational institutions and religious and intellectual circles, they began to lose their grip over time. Ashʿarī, a man of dominating stature and agile mind, had diffused the magic of the Muʿtazilī school and reestablished the supremacy of the Sharīʿa and the Sunna. His achievement can be attributed as much to his scholastic principles and maxims as to his own qualities of mind and heart, his intelligence, and his scholarship. The Ashʿarī's school could have maintained its hold over the people by continuing to produce similarly illuminating personalities. Unfortunately, his followers developed a sense of complacency, especially after the fifth/eleventh century, and were content to simply transmit what they had learned from their mentors. They lost all originality, causing them to decline over time. Those few who were not content with treading the beaten path introduced Hellenistic philosophical concepts and terminology into their dialectic. They were enamored of the philosophical method of reasoning, though it neither provided any conclusive evidence to prove the issues they debated, nor did it employ an approach as natural and direct as that of the Qur'ān. The method employed was, by its very nature, inconclusive and made their doctrines vulnerable to refutation.[1] Thus, the dialecticians who borrowed philosophical terminology, concepts, and approaches did not render any help to the orthodox school they claimed to represent, and they failed to gain the respect of the rationalists and philosophers.

1 As it was refuted by Ibn Taymiyya in some of his works, especially in *Al-Radd ʿala 'l-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Response to the Logicians).

Popularity of Hellenistic Philosophy

Owing to the patronage and keen interest of the caliph, a large number of Syriac, Greek, Latin, and Persian works on Hellenistic philosophy had been translated into Arabic. Several of these were treatises pertaining to the Aristotelian school, which were proving harmful to intelligent but imprudent youth. These translations also included works on logic, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and other sciences which could have been studied to great benefit. But more interest was shown for metaphysical writings, which were merely a collection of Greek mythology cleverly presented as an elaborate, well-argued philosophy. It was a spell of words, ideas, and thoughts based on certain assumptions and conjectures that were fanciful and unverifiable. Greek philosophy dealt with the genealogy of the heavens, the active intellect, and horoscopes representing the movement of the assumed First Cause, *logos* and *nous*. For a people Allāh had bestowed with prophecy, and through the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ had endowed with true knowledge of His essence and attributes and of the beginning and end of creation and human existence, it was hardly necessary to waste time on mythology passed off as philosophy. Nevertheless, the philosophers, who were great admirers of Greek logic, physics, and mathematics, accepted this mythology couched in philosophical terms as though it were a revealed truth. It is rather amusing to see how these people, who venerated Greek sciences as the fountainhead of classical wisdom, also accepted their metaphysical pursuits so eagerly. Perhaps they felt themselves in need of Greek metaphysics and philosophy just as they needed the Greek empirical sciences.

Arab Philosophers

In the world of Islam, Greek philosophy was destined to win over such prominent thinkers as were not to be found among the Greeks themselves, including Yaʿqūb al-Kindī (d. c. 258/872), Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī[1] (d. 339/950), and Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā[2] (d. 428/1036). These men ascribed to Aristotle such an infallible status in piety, moral excellence, knowledge, and wisdom as perhaps cannot be even claimed by the First Cause itself. It was truly a misfortune of the Islamic world that the major portion of its Hellenistic inheritance comprised the works of Aristotle, who, being a freethinker, differed, rather than agreed, with the Prophetic teachings. It was another misfortune that among the Arab philosophers, none was conversant with the languages in which these

1 Known as Alpharabius in the Latin West.

2 Called Avicenna in Europe.

philosophical works were originally written. They had, therefore, to depend on translations and commentaries that were either incorrect or colored by their translators and interpreters. Aristotle had thus come to wield such an influence over the Arab philosophers that they made his system the basis of their philosophical speculations without evaluating or critiquing his thought.

The Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')

By the end of the fourth/tenth century, the speculations of Greek and Hellenistic philosophers had generally been adopted by Muslim rationalist schools. It became fashionable among the educated youth who wanted to be seen as intellectuals and progressive elites. The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, or Brethren of Purity, was a kind of secret fraternity similar to Freemasonry. It came into existence during the second half of the fourth century with its seat in Basra. It was a school of thought based on Hellenistic philosophy that strove to formulate ideological and legal doctrines. The charter of their aims and objectives ran thus:

> The Islamic Sharī'a has been polluted by ignorance and perversion of the truth, and it can now be purified only through philosophy; for the latter comprises religious tenets, knowledge, wisdom, and analogical methods of reasoning. Now only a synthesis of Greek philosophy and the Sharī'a of Muḥammad can provide perfection.[1]

The members of the society had instructions not to waste their time and energy on older people who were settled in their views, but to seek sympathizers among the youth, who were more open to accepting new ideas.[2]

The Brethren summed up the philosophical and scientific learning of the time in a comprehensive collection of fifty-two epistles, called *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, that dealt with every branch of science, including physics, mathematics, metaphysics, and philosophy. The Mu'tazilīs and other rationalists who were sympathetic to their ideas gave widest circulation to these epistles, which found their way to Andalusia within a hundred years.[3]

The Mu'tazilīs and Philosophers

In their effort to rationalize the tenets of faith and to use human reason, which they regarded as infallible, to confirm such metaphysical doctrines

1 Luṭfī Jumu'a, *Tārīkh Falāsifat al-Islām*, 253.

2 Ibid., 260–261.

3 Ibid., 254.

as the nature and attributes of Allāh Most High and the divine origin of the Qur'ān, the Muʿtazilīs had, wittingly or not, done a great disservice to Islām. Nevertheless, they were people of faith who believed in revelation, feared Allāh, scrupulously followed their religious obligations, enjoined the lawful, and prohibited the wrong.[1] This was so because they took their religion seriously, and their rationalistic tendencies did not owe their origin to any external influence.[2] In view of these features of Muʿtazilism, it did not produce any inclination toward apostasy, atheism, or denial of revelation and the Hereafter, nor did it produce a dangerous tendency toward passivity and inertia, nor was the vigor and enthusiasm for faith among the Muslims enfeebled by it.

Greek philosophy was, however, quite different from Muʿtazilism. Insofar as philosophy claims to be an infallible source through which one can attain knowledge of Allāh in the fullness of His essence, it is a rival to revelation. Philosophy builds up a system of thought and approach which is opposed to the faith and the tenets of a revealed religion. Obviously, therefore, as Greek philosophy captured the imagination of people, their respect for religion and the prophets dwindled. Not only was faith in revelation beginning to be viewed from an entirely different angle, but so were the ethical norms and injunctions it laid down for the practical conduct of life. Philosophy gave birth to a faction of Muslims who were openly antagonistic to religion and took pride in rejecting the tenets of Islam. There were also philosophers who were not courageous enough to forsake Islam openly. They were content to pay lip service to it, but they had in fact lost all faith in the religion.

The Bāṭinīs (Esoterics)

Philosophy also gave birth to a new schism in Islam which was even more deleterious to the spirit of religion and the teachings of the Messenger ﷺ than philosophy itself. These were the Bāṭinīs, the adherents of a theological school whose name comes from the word *bāṭin*, meaning "inner, esoteric." Its adherents and exponents were mostly drawn from people who had lost their national kingdoms under the irresistible sway of Islam. These people could not hope to regain their lost power and prestige in any open contest with the strength of the Muslims. They also included self-indulgent people and those who sought positions of power and influence but viewed the injunctions laid down by Islam for the practical conduct of life as obstacles in their

1 *Ḍuḥā 'l-Islām*, 3:64.

2 They held that is was a duty of every Muslim to enjoin the lawful and prohibit the wrong. They also maintained that anyone guilty of major sin would be eternally damned.

way. All these categories of people gathered under the banner of the Bāṭinīs, knowing that they could neither gain victory over Islam in the battlefield nor invite Muslims to renounce their faith. They were aware that any attempt to follow either of these courses would ignite a frenzy of enthusiasm among the Muslims in defense of Islam. They therefore chose an entirely novel approach to undermining Islam.

Esoteric and Exoteric Interpretations of the Scripture

Scripture has clearly laid out the tenets of belief and code of conduct because these are meant to be understood and acted upon by every human being: "And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make (the message) clear for them" (Q 14:4).

The meaning of this verse is manifestly clear. The Prophet of Islam ﷺ had also explained the importance of divine revelation and lived up to its precepts so that his followers would not remain in any doubt. The vocabulary of the Qur'ān and its meanings have thus been handed down directly from the Messenger ﷺ without interruption, and have ever after been recognized and accepted by everyone as authentic and genuine knowledge, to which no one has raised any objection. The terms prophecy (*nubuwwa*), messengership (*risāla*), angels (*malā'ika*), resurrection (*maʿād*), Paradise (*Janna*), Hellfire (*Jahannam*), law (Sharīʿa), obligatory (*farḍ*), necessary (*wājib*), lawful (*ḥalāl*), unlawful (*ḥarām*), poor-due (*zakāt*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), fast (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) and others convey a concise and exact statement of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and teachings of Islam. In reality, these teachings and articles of faith have been handed down without any divergence whatsoever, as have the vocabulary and terminology developed to represent them. The two have become so interdependent that one cannot be altered without a deviation in the other.

Whenever the words "prophet," "apostle," "messenger," "prayer," or "poor-due" are used, they denote the same descriptions taught by the Messenger ﷺ and understood by his Companions ﷺ and successors, all of whom acted on them in a particular manner and transmitted the meaning of these words, which have been handed down by one generation to another. The Bāṭinīs knew that the interdependence of Qur'ānic vocabulary and its meanings form the key to illuminating the doctrines of Muslim faith. These constitute the moorings of intellectual and devotional life, connecting the later generations to the fountainhead of divine guidance that lay in the past. If the Bāṭinīs could only drive a wedge between the past and the present—sever the con-

necting link by rendering the meaning of Qur'ānic vocabulary ambiguous, undefined, and obscure—the Umma could be forced to give credibility to any innovation or deviation, including agnosticism or disbelief.

The Bāṭinīs therefore began a vigorous campaign to popularize a new type of Qur'ānic exegesis and interpretation of the Sunna that endowed the vocabulary used therein with a hidden or mystic meaning separate from its open or manifest meanings. It was claimed that these allegorical or enigmatic meanings, which were beyond the range of ordinary understanding and accessible only to the initiate, led to a purer knowledge than the overt meanings of the Qur'ānic terms as they were commonly understood by the scholars. The laity, clinging to the literal meanings, could never attain the true hidden content of the revelation. The Bāṭinīs maintained that the detailed ritual enjoined by the Sharīʿa was a cold formality meant to safeguard the spiritual existence of the masses. In other words, the Qur'ānic terminology, like a veil, hides its deep, secret meaning, but when an initiate attains pure, sublime knowledge, he is set free from the legal obligations of the Sharīʿa.[1] They based their claim on the following verse of the Qur'ān: "And he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear" (Q 7:157).

After accepting the doctrine of obvious and hidden meanings in principle, it presented no difficulty to explain the meaning of terms like "prophet," "revelation," "angels," or "hereafter" in whatever manner one desired. Here is an example:

> A *nabī* (prophet) is a person illuminated by the Holy Spirit of the Divine Being. *Jibrīl* (Gabriel) is not an angel, but an allegorical name for divine outpouring. *Maʿād* (resurrection) signifies the returning of a thing toward its origin. *Janāba* (ritually impurity) refers to divulging a secret; *ghusl* (ritual bath) means the renewal of a covenant; *zinā* (fornication), the transmission of the secret and occult knowledge to the uninitiated; *ṭahāra* (purity), the disavowal of all tenets save the Bāṭinī cult; *tayammum* (dry ablution), the acquisition of knowledge from an illuminated teacher; *ṣalāt* (prayer), a call to obey the leader of the time; *zakāt* (poor-due), the spreading of knowledge among the capable and pure; *ṣawm* (fasting), taking precaution to guard the secret; and ḥajj (pilgrimage), seeking the knowledge of true wisdom, which

1 The Bāṭinīs also believed in the suspension of the obligations enjoined by the Sharīʿa. One Bāṭinī imām, known as Sayyid Idrīs, says, "Allāh conferred prophecy on Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl [a grandson of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq whom the Ismāʿīlīs consider their seventh imām], who abrogated the Sharīʿa of the Prophet Muḥammad" (Idrīs, *ʿĀṣimat Nufūs al-Muhtadīn*). Similar views held by Muʿizz li-Dīni 'Llāh al-Fāṭimī have also been reported.

is the objective of reason. The knowledge of the esoteric is *Janna* (Paradise); the literal interpretation is *Jahannam* (Hellfire). The Kaʿba refers to the person of the prophet while ʿAlī is its gate. Nūḥ's ﷺ flood described in the Qur'ān refers to a deluge of knowledge in which the unilluminated were drowned. The bonfire of Nimrod alludes to his wrath, not a literal fire; Ibrāhīm was asked not to offer his son for sacrifice, but to obtain a pledge from him. Gog and Magog refer to the literalists, the staff of Mūsā actually means the argument and proofs that were furnished by him, etc.[1]

The Traitors of Islam

The Bāṭinīs' approach regarding the hidden, deeper application of Allāh's word or the Messenger's ﷺ teachings, and their repudiation of the manifest meanings, have always been conveniently adopted by traitors and hypocrites. The so-called deeper sense, interwoven with mystical and philosophical ideas, borrowed from a variety of sources, can be equally shaped to fit the requirement of either a learned scholar or an uncritical mind in order to undermine the intellectual, moral, social, and religious structure of Muslim society. It can be employed to secure a split within the body of Islam; indeed, all the later rebels against the prophecy of Muḥammad ﷺ have taken advantage of this heretical approach. All those impostors who have subsequently elevated themselves to the position of a false prophet have first rendered ambiguous the terminology employed by the Qur'ān and the Sunna. Two cases in point are Baha'ism in Iran and Qadianism in India.[2]

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1 Daylamī, *Qawāʿid ʿAqāʾid Āli Muḥammad* (Bāṭinite), 16–18.

2 The Qadianis too, like the Bāṭinīs, have denied the commonly understood meanings of such terms as "the seal of prophecy," Masīḥ and his second coming, miracles, Dajjāl, etc. The Qur'ānic vocabulary has been retained but the meaning of these terms has been drastically changed, as can be seen from the writings of Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad and the commentary of the Qur'ān by Muhammad Ali.

Baha'is, on the other hand, have even produced a new sacred law on the basis of their esoteric interpretation. Their law enjoins fast for one month in a year, but the month is only nineteen days. Instead of beginning the fast from early morning, they begin it from sunrise. The faithful are required to follow the dictates of the law from the age of 11 to 42 and are thereafter freed from its obligations. Ablution is not obligatory but simply recommended. Intergender veiling rules (*ḥijāb*) do not apply. It is obligatory to visit the house in which the Bāb, the founder of the sect, was born. Congregational prayer is to be offered only for a funeral. Nothing remains polluted after one accepts the faith of Baha'ism, and everything attains purity at the moment a faithful touches it. Water is never polluted. The law of inheritance differs from that of Islam (Shakīb Arsalān, 4:355, reproduced from the French *Encyclopedia of Islam*).

M. Huart has rightly written in his article on Baha'ism in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* that in the garb of Islamic reformation, the Bāb founded an entirely new religion whose fundamentals and

The so-called hidden or mystic interpretation of Qur'ānic vocabulary, an example of which has been given above, could hardly have been acceptable to a person of common sense. But dialectical quibbling had already produced an atmosphere of intellectual anarchy in the world of Islam, wherein people unnecessarily longed for hairsplitting and sophistry. The Bāṭinīs were therefore successful in misleading those sections of the people who, under the influence of Greek philosophy and mythology, were freely applying terminology like *nous* and *logos*, *Universal Spirit*, and *First Cause* to Islamic doctrines and rites. They also gathered around them people who were dissatisfied with the extremism of the orthodox school, while others, in the hope of helping the Ahl al-Bayt (the house of the Messenger ﷺ) or opposing the ruling dynasty, lent them a helping hand. With the help of an elaborate occult initiation ritual for their adherents, the Bāṭinīs created a secret yet highly efficient instrument of power that was a cause for concern. Powerful minds like Niẓām al-Mulk al-Ṭūsī and Fakhr al-Mulk fell to the terrorism and murderous assaults of the Bāṭinīs.[1]

Destruction of the Bāṭinīs' religious and political opponents through terrorism and murder became such a common practice that nobody, not even kings or the highest officials, could be sure that they would remain alive till the next day. Ibn al-Jawzī reported that in Isfahan, if anyone did not return to his house before the nightfall, it was presumed that he had been killed by the Bāṭinīs. Apart from the lawlessness, the Bāṭinīs had, as explained earlier, also fostered the growth of occult and heretical interpretations of the Qur'ānic text and the perversion of the accepted tenets of faith.

In an atmosphere supercharged with the anti-Islamic influences of the Bāṭinīs and philosophical ideas borrowed from varied sources, a richly endowed mind was needed to save the situation. It would require a person of outstanding knowledge and intellectual gifts, well-versed in philosophy as well as religious knowledge and capable of drawing upon the findings of his predecessors with a greater clarity and discernment. In order to bring about a synthesis of philosophical objectivity and religious faith, he must also be a man of unequalled piety and moral excellence, endowed with an unflinching faith and backed by a mystical insight into the Supreme Reality;

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beliefs are quite different from those of Islam, and have in fact been presented as such in order to create a new social order. The same is the case with Qadianis. Each has a prophet and a new religious order like their Bāṭinī predecessors.

1 For a detailed list of people killed at the hands of Bāṭinīs, see ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Niẓām al-Mulk Ṭūsī*, 560–563.

one who possessed a burning zeal for the renewal of the faith, who could give a call to uphold the tenets of the Sharīʿa and the Sunna. Such a man appeared on the scene in the middle of the fifth/eleventh century. He was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.

CHAPTER 7

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

IMĀM ABŪ ḤĀMID MUḤAMMAD ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī al-Ghazālī was born in Ṭūs at Ṭabarān (in present-day Iran) in 450/1058.[1] He lost his father while still very young. Although his father had entrusted him to the care of a mystic friend, he got himself admitted in a seminary for receiving education. Ghazālī first studied the Shāfiʿī school of jurisprudence from Shaykh Aḥmad al-Rādhakānī in his hometown and then moved on to Jurjān to continue his studies with Abū 'l-Naṣr al-Ismāʿīlī.

Thereafter Ghazālī went to Nishapur, where he became a disciple of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. His outstanding intellectual gifts were soon recognized, and he was appointed an assistant to his reputed teacher, who used to say that Ghazālī possessed encyclopedic knowledge.

Although only twenty-eight when he left Nishapur after the death of his mentor in 478/1085, he was held in greater respect than many senior scholars of the time. He went to Niẓām al-Mulk, the prime minister of Malikshāh, who awarded Ghazālī a coveted place in his court. Himself an erudite scholar, Niẓām al-Mulk fostered arts and literature through lavish patronage. Scholars in different branches of learning gathered round him, and discussions on literary and other academic topics had become an everyday affair. Ghazālī found no match to his genius and his polemical brilliance in these debates. Impressed by his outstanding intellectual gifts, Niẓām al-Mulk selected Ghazālī in 484/1091 for appointment as professor at the famous Niẓāmiyya College at Baghdad. This was the most coveted academic position of the time, though Ghazālī was then not more than thirty-four years old. His renown as a scholar, teacher, and an eloquent speaker spread so rapidly that his lectures began to be overcrowded by an ever-larger number of students and scholars.

1 Ṭūs lies near present-day Mashhad in northeastern Iran.

Sometimes, in addition to as many as three hundred students, hundreds of nobles and chiefs attended his lectures. Ghazālī soon came to occupy, on account of his scholarship, intelligence, and forceful personality, such a position of eminence in Baghdad that he was regarded a compeer to the chiefs of state. According to a contemporary, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī, Ghazālī surpassed in prestige and solemnity the nobility of Baghdad, including even the caliph.[1] In 485/1092, the Abbasid caliph Muqtadī bi-'Llāh appointed him his ambassador to the court of Turkān Khātūn (wife of Malikshāh), who was then regent over the Seljuq Empire. Another Abbasid caliph, Mustaẓhir bi-'Llāh, held Ghazālī in high esteem, and it was at his behest that he wrote a treatise to refute the cult of Bāṭinism. He named the book *Al-Mustaẓhirī* after the caliph.

Ghazālī's Intellectual Crisis

During this period of prosperity, fame, and accomplishment, to which most others could only aspire, it would have been natural for Ghazālī to have lived contentedly, as others might have done. But for such a man of lofty ideals, creative genius, and intellectual grit as Ghazālī, it was unthinkable to rest satisfied merely with position and prestige.

There can be no denying the fact that this very internal conflict and disquietude, the Promethean quest, made him a renewer (*mujaddid*) of the faith. However, history can offer but few such striking examples where one abandoned a brilliant career, fame, and position for satisfaction of the soul. Ghazālī has himself described the deep inner struggle which forced him to abandon all worldly possessions, including his teaching position, and to withdraw into a life of asceticism and solitary contemplation.

He writes in *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error):

> From the days of my early youth, I had a critical disposition. I met the people belonging to every cult and creed, inquired about their faith and tenets, which in due course made me disregard the beaten path. The faith I had inculcated in me from my childhood was shaken; for I thought the children born to Jews and Christians too develop a similar conviction in their own religions. Indeed, knowledge should not admit of any doubt in regard to its veracity, in the same way, for instance, that I know that ten is more than three.
>
> If anybody puts forward a claim that three exceeds ten and turns a staff into a snake to support his claim, I would be amazed by his feat, but my conviction

1 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 4:107.

that ten exceeds three would remain unchanged. When I contemplated the matter, I found that true cognition was possible only in the realm of sense perception and the conceptual faculty of grasping those rational principles that are more or less self-evident. But on further reflection, I realized that these too are not beyond doubt. Perception by the sense seated in the eye, of all human senses, is the strongest, but it too commits mistakes.

Thereafter, the dubiousness of the senses grew in me to such an extent that I lost all faith in the infallibility of the senses. I then turned to intellect but found it even more dubious and weaker than the senses. For about two months, my scepticism led me to doubt the possibility of any true cognition, but then Allāh helped me to retrace my steps. In returning to peace and reassurance, I acquired a sense of satisfaction over conceptual cognition. It was not, however, owing to any ordering of reasons or arguments, but simply on account of the light which Allāh caused to penetrate my heart.

After emerging from the earlier staleness of doubt, I had four groups before me who seemed to be engaged in the search for truth. These were the theologians, who claimed to possess insight and wisdom; the Bāṭinīs, who insisted on a hidden, true, and deeper knowledge vouchsafed to them through infallible *imāms*; the philosophers, who claimed for themselves mastery of logic and reason; and the mystics, who claimed to be illuminated and favored with inspired knowledge. I proceeded to explore the ideas, thoughts, and writings of each of these groups but was not satisfied with any of them. I studied the writings of the reputed dialecticians and authorities on this science and wrote a few treatises myself. I reached the conclusion that although this branch of learning fulfilled its own objective, it was not sufficient for my purpose, as it argued on the premises put forth by its opponents. The dialecticians have to rely upon a number of premises and propositions which they accept in common with the philosophers, or they are obliged to accept the authority of the Qur'ān or Sunna, or the consensus. But these could not really avail one who, like me, has no faith in anything but the necessary principles of reason.

In regard to philosophy, I though it necessary to make a detailed and critical study of the science before forming my own opinion on it. My teaching and writing commitments left me little time, having as I did as many as three hundred students who attended my lectures. I somehow managed to find time for it, however, and, having finished the complete literature on the subject within two years, I devoted one year to reflection on the premises of philosophy, I reached the conclusion that the sciences can be divided into six branches: mathematics, logic, physics, politics, ethics, and metaphysics. Of

these the first five do not either deny or affirm religion, nor is it necessary to reject them in order to affirm religion. The precepts of physics sometimes do come into conflict with religious doctrine, but such instances are few. In this regard one ought to believe that the natural phenomenon is not self-propelled but dependent on Allāh Almighty. It is generally true that those who encounter the intellectual agility and incisiveness of the philosophers in these sciences are overawed by them and are led to conclude that they would possess the same in every branch of learning. It is, however, not necessarily so that anyone skilled in one branch be as adept in another science as well. In any case, when people see the philosophers denying faith and conviction, they follow in their footsteps. On the other hand, some senseless exponents of Islam consider it their bounden duty to refute whatever the philosophers say and sometimes even go to the extent of denying their findings in the field of physics as well. A harmful effect of this is that all those who accept the veracity of the intellect's search for truth and uphold the necessary principles of reason begin to have doubts in Islam itself and become sceptics.

The only branch of knowledge that comes into conflict with religion is metaphysics, and it is in this science that the philosophers have generally been misled. In fact, the philosophers have themselves in this branch of science not been able to satisfactorily follow the laws of rigorous argumentation they had evolved for logical reasoning, and that is why they have wide differences on it. I therefore arrived at the conclusion that philosophy would not be able to satisfy me, for the intellect cannot by itself cover the entire field of objects and events nor unravel all mysteries.

As for the Bāṭinīs, I had an opportunity to make a detailed study of their cult while writing the *Mustaẓhirī*. I found that the veracity of their tenets and doctrines ultimately depends on the teachings of an infallible and illuminated teacher, the Imām. But the existence of such a teacher stands to be verified, and, in truth and reality, both are extremely dubious.

Now only mysticism remained to be examined, and so I turned my attention to it. Mysticism is of two kinds, intellectual and intuitional. It was easy for me to look into the first, and I went through Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb* and the tracts of Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, Junayd, Shiblī, Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and other mystics. I gathered whatever knowledge of mysticism could be had from the books, but I found that the knowledge of the essence of reality could be obtained not through study or mysticism but through intuition, transport, and ecstasy brought about by purification of the heart. Through the speculative branches of knowledge and the sacred and secular sciences I had

mastered, I had already attained an unflinching faith in the existence of the Supreme Reality, in prophecy, and in resurrection. This conviction was not, however, attained through an experience or argument that could be analyzed. It had been firmly implanted in my heart that eternal bliss could be had only through inculcating the awe of Allāh, renouncing the material world, and turning one's attention wholly to the eternal life in the Hereafter and to an earnest devotion to Allāh. None of this was possible, however, so long as one did not sever the attachments of position and riches, fame and worldly life.

I pondered over my own condition. I realized that I was wholly immersed in worldly temptations, its ties and attachments. The vocation of teaching appeared to be a noble pursuit, but further reflection revealed that I was paying my entire attention to sciences that were neither important nor beneficial for the Hereafter. I probed into the motives of my work as a teacher and found that instead of any sincere desire to win Allāh's favor, I was after honor and fame. I was convinced that I was on the edge of an abyss, and if I did not take immediate steps to retrieve the situation, I would be doomed to eternal fire.

Still undecided, I resolved one day to abandon everything and leave Baghdad; the next day I gave up my resolution. Six months passed by in this state of uncertainty. On the one hand, temptation's sway bade me remain where I was; on the other, faith gave the call to get up. It cried to me, "Up! Up! Your life is short and you have a long journey to make. All your pretended knowledge is nought but falsehood and fantasy." Often my carnal thoughts whispered to me, "This is a temporary yearning. Allāh has favored you with respect and honor. If you give it up and then try to retrace your steps and come back, you will not be able to get it back again. For about six months I remained thus, torn asunder by earthly passions and religious aspirations, until it became impossible to postpone my decision any longer. Then, Allāh Himself caused an impediment. He chained my tongue and prevented me from lecturing. Vainly I desired to teach my pupils who came to me, but my mouth went dumb. The silence to which I was condemned cast me into a violent despair. I lost all appetite. I could neither swallow a morsel of bread nor drink a drop of water. Gradually I became too weak, and at last the physicians who were treating me gave up all hope of my recovery. They said that my heart was so severely afflicted that no treatment would be of any avail till this affliction was removed. Finally, conscious of my weakness and of the prostration of my soul, I took refuge in Allāh like a man who has exhausted himself and is denied all means. I prayed to Him "Who answers the wronged one when he cries unto Him," and He made easy for me to sacrifice honor, wealth, and family.

I intended to go to Syria but told the people that I would go to Makka. When the people around me learned of my decision, they deprecated it deeply, for they could think of no laudable reason behind my resolve. In their opinion, I enjoyed a coveted place that enabled me to preach and disseminate knowledge. People also began to spread numerous rumors about me. Those who were far away thought that I was quitting my profession at the insistence of the administration. On the other hand, those who knew how much government was keen on retaining me considered it a misfortune that I was leaving the premier academy of Islamic learning.

At last I left Baghdad, having given away all my fortune and preserving only as much as was necessary for my support and that of my children. I went to Syria from Baghdad and remained there for two years. During this period I engaged myself in meditation and self-struggle. I practiced whatever I had learned of the ways of mystics and endeavored to purify my soul and rectify my morals and occupied myself with Allāh's remembrance. For a time I retired to the principal mosque of Damascus. I often went into one of the mosque's minarets and remained there in seclusion for days on end. From Damascus I went to Jerusalem. There too I would to retire into the Dome of the Rock.

After having visited the tomb of Ibrāhīm ﷺ, I felt a desire to go for the ḥajj and visit the Prophet's Mosque. So I embarked on my journey to the Hijaz. After the ḥajj was over, I went to my hometown, though I had no longing to visit my family. I took care to spend my time in secluded meditation, purification of the heart, and remembrance of Allāh at my house, but events and happenings, such as care for the needs of my dependants, constantly interfered with securing a perfect state of peace and bliss. I was not denied it entirely, however, and from time to time I was favored with illumination and ecstatic transports.

I spent ten years in this manner. What inspirations came to me during this period of meditation cannot be described, but I must say for the benefit of my readers that I came to know that the mystics were most truly godly, their life truly beautiful, their rules of conducts most perfect, and their morality most pure. It would not be possible to bring forth a more perfect and godly person even if the intellect of the rationalist, wisdom of the philosophers, and knowledge of the religious made a combined effort to do so. In their actions and practices, whether overt or secret, the mystics drew inspiration from the Prophetic light, beside which there is no other foundation of guidance.[1]

1 Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, 55–101 (summarized).

From Seclusion to Public Life

It would have been possible for Ghazālī to spend the rest of his life in solitary meditation and contemplation, enjoying the bliss of spiritual visions. However, for the great achievement Allāh had destined him to accomplish, it was necessary for Ghazālī to return again to teaching and writing. It was all the more necessary for Ghazālī to refute the philosophers and atheists and restore the upper hand to Islam in the fields of knowledge and intellect, especially as Allāh had granted him knowledge with certitude. There was then no other personage in the entire world of Islam more suited for the task. The fact is that Islam stood in need of him, and Allāh wanted him to perform what had already been set for him. He felt an urge to take up the defense of the faith. He describes his feelings in these words:

> When I looked around, I found that the faith of the people had been shaken owing to the influence of the philosophers, ignorance of the mystics, inertia of the jurists, and the weak and heartless vindication of religion by the theologians. People were losing their conviction and, although some, overborne by philosophy, still fulfilled the religious obligations, they had hardly any conviction of faith left in their hearts. Certain people performed the prayers merely as a physical exercise, some to emulate others; and there were others who considered religious practice necessary for gaining certain material benefits. These persons saw no harm in giving up these practices if they could find a way to save themselves from the harm which non-performance of religious observance would have entailed. I realized that I could easily remove their doubts. I saw myself, in fact, fully capable of exposing the hollowness and implausibility of their philosophical convictions because of my deep knowledge of the speculative sciences. I therefore felt an ardent desire to take up this work, since it appeared to be the crying need of the time. I said to myself, "How does it befit you to sit in seclusion? It is an epidemic that is spreading like wildfire, and the learned have themselves fallen victim to the same disease? The servants of Allāh have reached the brink of destruction." But then I thought whether it would be possible for me to accomplish such a huge task. I said to myself. "The guidance of the Prophet ﷺ was available in the days of yore, but now if you invite men to truth and the way of Allāh, the world will turn your enemy. How will you single-handedly struggle against them all and endure the hardships? This might have been possible under the regime of a pious king determined to assist and promote religion.
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> Thus I expressed my helplessness before Allāh and decided to spend the

rest of my life in seclusion. But it seems Allāh had willed otherwise. He created a desire in the sultan's heart. The sultan emphatically commanded me to proceed to Nishapur and fight the growing heretical tendencies. The king had appealed to me so earnestly that my rejection of his order would have certainly made him angry. Then I said to myself, "One of the reasons for your resolve having fallen apart, it cannot be right now to remain in seclusion, for this would simply mean avoiding discomforts and hardships. Has not Allāh said, 'Do men imagine that they will be left alone (at ease) because they say we believe and not be tested with affliction? Lo! We tested those who were before you. Thus Allāh knows those who are sincere and knows those who feign' [Q 28:2–3].

"And Allāh addressed his prophet thus even as he was the most exalted of His servants: 'Messengers indeed have been denied before you, and they were patient under the denial and the persecution till Our succor reached them. There is none to alter the decision of Allāh. Already there has reached you some of the tidings of the messengers (we sent before)'" [Q 6:34].

I also sought the advice of a few friends who were illuminated and have had spiritual visions. They advised me to give up seclusion. Few of them related the dreams some pious persons had seen which indicated that the step I proposed to take would have far-reaching effect for the revival of faith. They hinted that in the fifth century, which was to begin in a month, something remarkable was to happen that would renew the faith. It has been foretold in the ḥadīth that at the beginning of every century Allāh brings forth a man who restores and reanimates the faith of the people. All these tidings gave me hope. Allāh made it easy for me to set off to Nishapur, and I finally made up my mind to renounce seclusion in 499/1106.

I had left Baghdad in 488/1095, having been in seclusion for eleven years. Allāh had ordained it to happen thus, however. I could not have dreamed of giving up honor and fame before I left Baghdad, but Allāh had made that easy for me. Similarly, I could never had thought of renouncing my retirement and going back to teach again, but it too was made easy by Allāh.[1]

Ghazālī set off for Nishapur in 499/1106 to resume his teaching position in the Niẓāmiyya College. But there was a world of difference between the first time he took up the profession and the second time. Earlier he taught to secure honor, wealth, and position, but now he considered himself commissioned to exhort people to purify their morals and souls. He explains the difference thus:

1 Ibid., 114–116 (summarized).

I know that I have come back to my work of teaching, but it would not be correct to call it a resumption of my earlier occupation. There is a world of difference between the two. Before I would teach the sciences in a way calculated to bring honor, wealth, and position, and by my words and actions I led my students to that direction. But now I want to teach them the knowledge that helps to renounce wealth and position. Allāh is fully aware that this is my intention, and my only desire is that my present efforts lead to the purification of my soul and the souls of other people. I do not know whether I will reach my destination or pass away before completing my task. However, I believe and have an unflinching conviction, on account of the knowledge of certitude which has been given to me, that power rests with Allāh alone. It is only He who can save one from evil and profanity and lead unto the path of sanctity and grace. I did not come here of my own accord; it was Allāh who moved me on to this place; I did not begin my work, but Allāh caused me to begin it. I beseech Allāh that He first cleanse and elevate my soul before He causes me to reform and purify the souls of others. May He reveal unto me the righteousness which I may follow and disclose the evils which I may forsake.[1]

Ghazālī's Revival Efforts

Endeavors of Ghazālī for the revivification of Islam were twofold, as follows:

1. He stemmed the tide of philosophy and of the Bāṭinī evil and began a counterattack on these movements on behalf of Islam.
2. He made a critical evaluation of the religious and moral state of the Islamic society of the time and proposed measures to reform it.

Encounters with Philosophy

The effort made till the time of Ghazālī to counteract the atheistic influence of Greek philosophy consisted merely of an apologetic vindication of Islamic tenets. Philosophers were then taking the offensive, and the theologians of Islam were parrying the attack. The philosophers were undermining the very foundation of Islam, while the theologians tried to shield it. But no theologian had the courage to strike at the roots of philosophy. In fact, no scholar of Islam had tried to make any critical evaluation of the philosophic premises and to besiege the aggressor in his own citadel. The tone of the dialecticians—save only that of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, who for his part did not have to face the philosophers—was apologetic or at best defensive.

1 Ibid., 28–30 (summarized).

Ghazālī was the first man to combine a profound knowledge of religious sciences with a detailed and deep study of philosophy. He then wrote *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (The Aims of the Philosophers), in which he summed up the salient issues of logic, metaphysics, and physics. In this book he condensed the premises of philosophy dispassionately and explicitly. He made it clear in the introduction to this book that mathematics is a science which does not admit of any difference of opinion but has nothing to do with the religion, neither in affirmation or negation of the latter. Religion does, however, come into conflict with metaphysics. Logical syllogisms are sometimes wrong, while there may also be differences of opinion about the terminology employed in this branch of knowledge. Physics is sometimes mixed up with facts, uncertain or dubious, for metaphysics is also included in its scope. Logic merely subserves these sciences by lending them its terminology.

Ghazālī then wrote another book, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers). In it he criticizes, from an Islamic viewpoint, the physics and metaphysics of the philosophical school and brings out their weaknesses and contradictions in lucid and forceful language. We find Ghazālī expressing himself confidently, in an elegant and penetrating style. At places he employs satirical language that was not only effective but perhaps necessary to restore the self-confidence of those who had been overawed by philosophy. We find the author self-reliant and indomitable, attempting to demolish the reputation of the teachers of philosophy. He speaks of the Greek philosophers and guides as his equals and points out their mistakes in a manner that none before had dared to do. In order to save the day for Islam, it was imperative that someone be able to strike at the foundations of philosophy rather than merely defending the faith. Ghazālī rose to the occasion, and this book bespeaks his endeavor from cover to cover. In the introduction to *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* he writes:

> Nowadays we see people who appear to regard themselves intellectually superior to the populace. These people look disdainfully on religious practices, having learned the awe-inspiring names of some of the Greek philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato. They have learned from the eulogistic writing of their admirers that the Greek scholar of old had made far-reaching discoveries in the fields of mathematics, logic, physics, and metaphysics, and that these teachers were peerless in qualities of intellect and reason, but that they had rejected the faith and its doctrines. The Greek masters saw religion as a manmade dogma without any basis in truth. Now, following in the footsteps

> of their mentors, these elements too have rejected religion so that they may be taken as the intelligent, liberal, and smart set. Simply to pass themselves off as an elite intelligentsia, these people denigrate religion, and it is why I thought of bringing to light the mistakes committed by the Greek philosophers in their writings on metaphysics. I also intend to demonstrate how the premises and principles, the notions and observations, of these philosophers are not a whit more than child's play or, indeed, a laughing-stock.[1]

After giving a detailed description of the genealogy of the Greek philosophic-cum-metaphysical concepts like *logos*, *nous*, the First Cause, or the intermediate agents between the Primal Cause and His creation, Ghazālī becomes more trenchant and lively in his criticism of the philosophers. He writes:

> Your doctrines and details thereof are simply assumptions and conjectures, or, to be truthful, obscure reflections overcast with darkness. Nobody would doubt the insanity of a man who even dreams of such nonsensical things. . . . I really wonder how even a brainless fellow can swallow such inconsistencies, much less those philosophers who are even inclined to hair-splitting in logical disputations.[2]

He expands this idea at another place, where he writes:

> In venerating (the Active Intellect), these persons have completely overlooked to accord the reverence and awe due to Allāh Almighty. They have made Him an ineffective deity, a simple essence, dealing with the universals and having no knowledge of the particulars; he is distinct from a lifeless entity only insofar as He possesses consciousness of His own self. Verily, Allāh misguides those who forsake the path of divine guidance and deny His revelation: "I made them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation" [Q 18:51].
>
> Those who have misgivings about the omnipotence of Allāh think that divine things can be subjected to their thought and imagination. Being presumptuous of their Intellect, they hold that it is not necessary to follow the prophets of Allāh. That these persons should propagate, under the cover of philosophy, such ludicrous presumptions as others would be ashamed to dream of, is indeed natural and reasonable.[3]

1 Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, 2–3.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 31.

Effect of Tahāfut al-Falāsifa

Imām Ghazālī's courageous criticism and, to an extent, the denigration of philosophy began a new chapter in the history of Islamic theology that was later brought to successful completion by Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya.

Tahāfut al-Falāsifa caused a stir in the ranks of philosophers who had to suffer irreparable loss on account of it. However, after Ghazālī there arose no philosopher worthy of note for a hundred years. At last, near the close of the sixth century/twelfth, Ibn Rushd, a great admirer of Aristotle and a spirited defender of philosophy, wrote *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (Incoherence of the Incoherence), a rebuttal to *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*. Many scholars are of the view that if Ibn Rushd had not put up the defence on behalf of philosophy, it would have been crippled by the hostile criticism of Ghazālī. The efforts of Ibn Rushd renewed philosophy's lease on life for another hundred years.[1]

Attack on the Bāṭinīs

Besides philosophy, the crisis caused by the Bāṭinī movement had received Ghazālī's attention during his first stay in Baghdad, when he wrote the *Mustaẓhirī* at the insistence of the then caliph. Ghazālī made a mention of this book in his personal account of his search for truth, *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*. Ghazālī wrote three other treatises entitled *Ḥujjat al-Ḥaqq* (Proof of the Truth), *Mufaṣṣil al-Khilāf* (Clarifier of the Disagreement), and *Qāṣim al-Bāṭiniyya* (Backbreakers of the Esoterics).[2] These were perhaps also written at this time. Two more books on the subject, *Faḍā'iḥ al-Ibāḥiyya* (Infamies of the Permissives) and *Mawāhīm al-Bāṭiniyya* (Notions of the Esoterics), have been mentioned in the last of Ghazālī's writings. No one else could have faced the Bāṭinīs so successfully as Ghazālī did, for, besides being a scholar of both the secular and sacred sciences, he was fully aware of the ways of mystics. Taking shelter behind the terminology drawn from philosophy, the Bāṭinī cult of "esoteric meanings" was a combination of sophistry and conspiracy. For a man like Ghazālī it was comparatively easy to smash this snare of Bāṭinism. His effective answer to the challenge of Bāṭinism discredited the sect ever after.

Ghazālī's Social Critique and the Iḥyā'

The second remarkable achievement of Ghazālī was his evaluation of the religious and moral state of the society from an Islamic view-

1 *Tārīkh Falāsifat al-Islām*, 72.

2 Ghazālī has mentioned these three titles in his *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, 26.

point, which awakened the spirit for the re-Islamization of the community. *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), Ghazālī's magnum opus, was the result of his endeavors in this regard. This work occupies a distinguished place among the few literary works which have had a lasting effect in molding the moral and spiritual life of the Islamic world. Ḥāfiẓ Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404), author of the *Alfiyya*,[1] who brought out a collection of the ḥadīths quoted in the *Iḥyā'*, held it up as the foremost literary composition of Islam. ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī, a contemporary of Ghazālī and a student of Imām al-Ḥaramayn, says that no book like it had been written before. Shaykh Muḥammad Gāzarūnī declared that if all the sciences were effaced completely, he could revive them with the help of the *Iḥyā'*.[2] Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Jawzī differed with Ghazālī on many issues, but he acknowledged the popularity and matchless sincerity of the *Iḥyā'* and wrote a summary of it under the caption *Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn*.

The *Iḥyā'* was written at a time when Ghazālī had returned home after his more than ten years of seclusion and meditation. He now wanted to disseminate his message of reform and rectitude. Reflecting the tremendous sincerity and heroic sacrifice, heartfelt certitude, and ardent zeal of the author to revive the true faith, the *Iḥyā'* presents a striking example. Shiblī Nuʿmānī writes in *Al-Ghazālī*:

> In Baghdad he felt an irresistible urge to embark on the quest for truth. He proceeded to study each religion but still remained unsatisfied. At last he turned to mysticism, but it was something to be experienced in the recesses of one's heart rather than to be studied, and the first step toward it was purification of the heart and transformation of the self. The preoccupations of Ghazālī, however, left no room for it. What did honor and fame, sermons and debates, have to do with the purification of heart and soul? Obviously, it was a path that leads to wilderness.
>
> At last, donning a mendicant's habit, he left Baghdad and took to wandering. After a long period spent alternately in complete seclusion and meditation, he gained access to divine manifestation. He would have spent the rest of his life lost in spiritual visions, but witnessing the contamination of religion and morals all around him—a malady from which the wealthy and the destitute, the laity and the elite, the learned and the unlearned, were suffering alike—he began to give expression to his experiences and convictions. He could not

1 This is a work on ḥadīth theory also known as *Al-Tabṣira wa 'l-Tadhkira fī ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*.

2 ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḥasanī, *Taʿrīf al-Aḥyā' bi Faḍā'il al-Iḥyā'*, 1:14.

bear with equanimity the descent of the mentors of faith into a cesspool of crass materialism. He wrote the book in these circumstances. As he himself writes in its preface:

"I found every one hankering after material gains. People had become forgetful of the eternal salvation, while the scholars of religion, who were guides to the right path, were not to be found any longer. There remained only those who had lost their souls to worldly temptations. These people had led everyone to suppose that knowledge consists simply in the debates and arguments by which they spread their fame, or the ornate sermons by which they held the people spellbound, or the legal opinion by which they sat in judgment to settle the disputes of others. The knowledge that was required to illuminate the path leading to the world to come had thus completely disappeared. I could not endure the state of affairs and had ultimately to sound the alarm."[1]

Ghazālī's Critique of Society

Ghazālī's object was to bring about a moral and spiritual transformation in the people of his time. To this end, he wanted to create an awareness of the ills and weaknesses the Muslims and their religious and intellectual leaders were suffering from; to tell them how the devil of earthly passions had taken hold of the different sections of society; and to let them realize what factors were responsible for diverting their attention from the true content of faith to its outer forms, rituals, and customs, thus making them oblivious of the eternal life and the will and pleasure of Allāh. In order, therefore, to achieve the end he had in view, Ghazālī undertook a detailed analysis of the intellectual and moral approach of contemporary society toward life and the world. He highlighted the vices of the different sections, defined the aims and the methods necessary to achieve those objectives, delineated the individual and communal obligations of the people, brought out the distinguishing features and differences between secular and sacred sciences, invited the attention of the affluent and ruling classes to their shortcomings, criticized the unjust laws and rules promulgated by the state, and exhorted them to give up their un-Islamic ways, customs, and practices. It was thus the first detailed sociological study in Islam, and it courageously and poignantly brought out the social and moral ills of society and suggested measures for its reform and transformation into a healthy community.

1 Shiblī Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghazālī*, 63–64.

The Religious Scholars

Ghazālī held the religious scholars responsible for the general religious and moral degeneration of the Muslim peoples. To him, religious scholars were the salt of the earth; if they went astray, nothing could keep the people on the right path. An Arab poet has expressed the same idea in these words:

> O group of reciters, O salt of the earth.
> If the salt itself gets contaminated, what is there to purify it?

Complaining that the prevailing widespread vices were traceable to the negligence of religious teachers, Ghazālī writes:

> The third reason, which really constitutes an incurable disease, is that there are patients but no physicians who are available for their treatment. The scholars are the physicians, but these days they are themselves confined to the sickbed and unable to cure others.

Ghazālī offers the same reason for the waywardness of rulers and kings. He writes:

> In short, the debasement of the people proceeds from the corruption of their rulers, who get perverted on account of the moral decline of the scholars of religion. Had there been no self-seeking judges and religious scholars, the rulers would not have become so depraved, for they would have had to be mindful of the warnings of the scholars.[1]

The neglect by religious scholars of the time to enjoin right and forbid wrong, as the servants of old used to do, was severely criticized by Ghazālī. He deplored the timidity of the religious teachers of his time, who were not courageous enough to uphold what was right in the face of kings because they had been infected by love of wealth, power, and honor. After citing numerous instances where the past scholars had fearlessly stood against the injustice of powerful despots and tyrannical rulers, he says in the *Iḥyā'*:

> This is how the learned enjoined the right and forbade the wrong. They did not care at all for the pomp and glory of the kings, for they used to put their trust in Allāh alone and were confident that He would protect them. They were ever willing to lay down their lives for the sake of a righteous cause, if Allāh so desired. Whatever they said was taken to heart, for their intentions were pure, and their spotless sincerity molded even the hard-hearted brutes.

1 Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 2:132.

> But now the earthly temptations have made them dumb, and even if they speak out it has no effect because they lack sincerity. They can be effective even now if they cultivate selfless detachment and earnestness. People have become depraved because of their rulers, and the rulers have too because of the learned who have declined morally on account of their love for wealth, power, and honor. One who has been infected by worldly temptations cannot admonish even the lowly and the poor, much less the nobles and kings.[1]

Most of the religious scholars of his day, as Ghazālī pointed out, had given themselves up to hair-splitting on juristic issues and cavilling at real or imaginary problems. In social gatherings and religious meetings, royal courts and scholarly seminars, specious contentions of a juristic nature had come to be regarded as an inevitable intellectual diversion. It had become such a rage in those times that in their craze to arm themselves for a knock-out victory in debates and disputations, the scholars neglected all other branches of learning, including even the religious sciences—the knowledge necessary for spiritual and moral rectitude or to prepare oneself for life in the Hereafter.

Ghazālī protests this state of affairs in the *Iḥyā'* in these words:

> If any jurist is asked about the virtues and vices like patience and thankfulness, fear and awe, envy and malice, hypocrisy and deception, contentment and earnestness, or how to avoid hankering after the praise and respect of others, he would not be able to give any answer, although he ought to know these as the life in the world to come depends on them. On the other hand, if you ask him about [the juridical rulings of] *li'ān* (mutual imprecation),[2] *ẓihār* (incestuous comparison),[3] *sabq* (riding competition), or *ramy* (shooting), he will give a detailed description of each, even though one seldom comes across these issues; and if anybody does need a juristic opinion on these matters, one can easily obtain it in every town. These scholars thus devote their entire time and energy in learning and teaching the details of similar insignificant issues but remain oblivious of the knowledge essential for a religious teacher.

1 Ibid., 2:312.

2 A procedure in which the husband accuses his wife of adultery without evidence, so they both swear four oaths, by which he invokes a curse (*la'na*) on himself and she invokes the wrath of Allāh upon herself, if they should be telling a lie. This allows him to reject the paternity of the child from himself.

3 *Ẓihār* was a pre-Islamic form of divorce in which the husband compared his wife to his mother's back (or that of any unmarriageable kin), essentially indicating that she is unlawful for him just as his mother is. This is a form of oath that needs to be expiated before the husband can cohabit with his wife.

If these scholars are ever asked about it, their reply is that they are engaged in acquiring a religious knowledge which constitutes a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*) enjoined by the Sharīʿa. They are really keeping their own selves in the dark and deceiving others, for as everybody knows, he who wants to acquit himself of a communal obligation should first discharge the obligations enjoined on him personally.

Also, there are many other communal obligations which take precedence, as, for example, we have many non-Muslim physicians in the city whose evidence is not acceptable under the Sharīʿa in religious matters requiring medical opinion. But we do not find any turning to the study of medicine. Students overcrowd the classrooms of the sciences pertaining to jurisprudence, logic, and dialects, although there are hundreds of jurisconsults who are ever willing to let one have their legal opinions. I fail to understand how these scholars can defend their engagement in a communal obligation which is being already performed by numerous scholars while disregarding another obligation which is not being attended by anyone. Is there any reason for it except that the study of medicine cannot help them to secure trusteeship of charitable trusts, enforcement of wills, guardianship of orphans and management of their property, appointment to the posts of judges and official jurists, respect and honor in governmental circles or precedence over their compatriots, friends, and foes?[1]

At another place in the *Iḥyā'* he writes:

There is not a town in which several matters do not assume the position of joint or communal obligations, but there is none to look after these or pay any heed to them. Take, for Instance, the study of medicine. There are a number of towns in which there is no practicing physician whose evidence is admissible in law, but these lack an interest in this profession. Similar is the case with the obligation incumbent on all Muslims to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong (but it is being overlooked by everybody).[2]

Ghazālī laments people's general lack of interest in and apathy toward the tenets of faith and calls attention to the need for spreading literacy and disseminating the knowledge of religion. After emphasizing this critical need for spreading religious knowledge, he continues:

For anyone who is concerned about his religion, teaching and spreading

1 Ibid., 1:19.

2 Ibid., 1:38.

knowledge of the faith—which is also a joint obligation—is so consuming an occupation that it would not permit him to go into unnecessary juristic details and waste time with scholastic hair-splitting or other such trivialities.[1]

Ghazālī explained why wrangling over disputed issues had come to assume such importance with scholars of his time, who, in due course, had begun to devote their time and energy to fruitless quibbling. Tracing the history of these vain disputations, he writes:

The caliphs succeeding the Prophet ﷺ were jurists, competent to give juristic opinions in all matters, and in this task they seldom required the help of other Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. The learned among the Companions, therefore, occupied themselves in the pursuit of salvation in the world to come, and if they were ever asked for a legal opinion, they would refer the inquirer to another jurist and themselves remain absorbed in the remembrance of Allāh. Historians have preserved numerous instances of this kind. But thereafter, undeserving and incompetent persons came to preside over the Islamic commonwealth. They were not fit to give legal opinions or settle people's disputes and were therefore compelled to depend on jurisconsults for the administration of justice. The scholars among the descendants of the Prophet's Companions ﷺ generally followed in the footsteps of the scholars of old; they were aware of the true content of the faith, were selfless and detached, and hence avoided the company of rulers and kings. The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs had to look around for them and implore them to accept the offices of jurist and judge. The masses of the time, who witnessed such solicitations by kings and the devout jurists' cool disdain toward them, thought that the study of juristic sciences would be the easiest way to acquire riches and honor and gain access to the palace entourage or the nobility. These elements themselves applied for governmental offices and maneuvered to win the favor of rulers and administrators in the hope of achieving worldly success. Some of them gained their end while others licked the dust, but even those who did succeed had to humble themselves by applying for these offices. They had to come down from the exalted station of scholars to that of commoners. Another result was that scholars who were earlier implored to accept these offices began to offer themselves as candidates. Earlier they were honored for their selfless detachment from the ruling circles, but now lost their respect by becoming henchmen to kings and rulers. A few scholars in every age, however, were exceptions to the rule.

1 Ibid., 1:37–38.

In former times, analogical deductions drawn up on legal or theological questions, in accordance with the principles of jurisprudence and the teaching of the Sharīʿa, were needed primarily to meet the requirements of administration and justice. In due course, however, nobles and administrators, too, cultivated an interest in these matters and began to encourage scholars to discuss these issues in their presence. In view of the interest taken by the elite in these discussions, people began to devote themselves to the study of dialectics. Numerous treatises came to be written on the science of disputation. Rules were developed for these debates, and gradually the wrangling turned into a syllogistic art form. These people tried to justify their endeavors on the grounds that their aim was to protect the Scripture and the Sunna and to oppose innovation and deviation. Those who had earlier been engaged in giving legal opinions made the similar claim that they intended to serve the faith and the people by helping them settle their disputes.

A few rulers and administrators of later times undoubtedly looked with disfavor upon dialectics and disputation, for they thought that these polemics gave rise to academic orthodoxy and quarrelsome disputes, and not infrequently even to violent strife and bloodshed. On the other hand, there were also nobles and chiefs desirous of finding out which of the two schools of Islamic jurisprudence, the Ḥanafī or Shāfiʿī, was nearer to the right path. These elements encouraged discussion and debate on juristic issues. The scholars in their entourage accordingly put aside all dialectical quibbling on other issues and took up the controversies between these two juristic schools, overlooking the differences of opinion between other jurists such as Mālik ibn Anas, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, simply because their masters were not interested in their opinions. Laying a claim to the refinement and amplification of the Islamic legal corpus, and to the formulation of principles for analogical deduction, these scholars compiled innumerable dissertations on the subject, cultivated logical syllogisms, and developed it into a science of rationalization. They are still preoccupied with this vocation, and only Allāh knows to what extent they will go. Thus, the reason for the undue interest taken by the scholars in these controversies and contentious ratiocinations is what we have stated above. If the nobility or the powers that be were to take interest in the juristic differences of schools other than those of Abū Ḥanīfa and Shāfiʿī, these people would immediately start quibbling over the questions relating to those schools as well. And they would still claim that their aim is simply to acquire knowledge and to seek the pleasure of Allāh.[1]

1 Ibid., 1:38.

After tracing the origins of contentious debate, Ghazālī sets forth in some detail the ill effects of these quarrels. He also describes his own experience, as he himself had earlier taken a keen interest in such polemics.[1]

Further misunderstanding sprang from the terminology that was being used for the sciences and their problematic nuances cultivated in Ghazālī's time. The same classical words or phrases occurring in the Qur'ān, ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ, or the sayings or works of his Companions رضي الله عنهم were being widely used for these sciences. To give a few examples, in those times, the word *fiqh* (positive law) was being commonly used for the intricate and hypothetical details of legal questions as well as for the differences in legal opinion regarding such issues; *ʿilm* (knowledge) was being used to describe not only sacred but non-sacred learning as well; polemical theology and philosophical inquiry were known as *tawḥīd* (divine oneness); *tadhkīr* (reminding of acts of devotion to Allāh) was the name assigned to all sorts of lectures replete with fantastical tales; and *ḥikma* (wisdom) was used for occult and uncommon practices. With their indiscriminate use the peculiar sense conveyed by these terms in the context of the Qur'ān and the Sunna had come to be associated with these new sciences as well. Thus, the Qur'ānic phrase "So that they may understand religion" (Q 9:122) and the ḥadīth "Allāh grants understanding of religion to those He intends good for" were applied to juristic quibbling and hair-splitting; the divine tidings in "Those granted wisdom (in religion) have been bestowed a great favor" was co-opted to philosophy and polemical theology[2] of the fifth/eleventh century; and the verse "Remind, for you are but one who reminds" was employed for the vile sermons of ignorant and misguided preachers. Ghazālī explained how these words were being used out of their context to mean something they were never intended to convey. He traced the original meaning of these words and phrases, which had not only been misplaced but also differed widely from the sense conveyed during his time. Ghazālī's analysis was as instructive as it was helpful for removing the misconceptions that had been created by the careless and indiscriminate use of religious terminology then being used for the furtherance of new sciences.[3]

1 Ibid., 1:40–43.

2 Hence, this verse can still be found on the covers of many peripatetic philosophy textbooks, and even textbooks of Unani medicine (*ṭibb*).

3 *Iḥyāʾ*, 1:28, 34.

Critique of the Rulers and Kings

Ghazālī held that, along with the religious scholars, kings and rulers, administrators and nobles were also responsible for the widespread moral and spiritual degeneration of the people. Two hundred year earlier, ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Mubārak had expressed in poetic form what Ghazālī felt about kings and nobles:

> And who corrupts religion but kings, hermits, and evil scholars?

Giving no mind to his personal safety, Ghazālī stood up against the unjust ways of the powerful despots and autocratic rulers who considered themselves above every law. It was common practice among scholars of those days to accept donations or stipends granted by the sitting ruler. But Ghazālī was courageous enough to denounce these awards as ill gotten. He declared that these grants were at best doubtful and at worst prohibited. He writes, "The revenues accruing to kings these days are mostly prohibited, for they seldom have a lawful income, and if they have any, it is but trifling." He further says:

> The wealth at the disposal of kings in our times is prohibited either in its entirety or its majority. There is nothing surprising in this because we find nowadays no trace of lawful sources like the alms or spoils of war. No income from these sources generally reaches the king. Of the lawful sources, only the protection tax (*jizya*) now remains, but numerous unjust means are employed in the recovery of these dues that are not allowed by the Sharīʿa. The officials of the state exceed the prescribed limits both on the amounts to be recovered and the persons to be assessed for the protection tax. The conditions laid down for assessment of this tax are also disregarded. Apart from these sources of income, the coffers of the state are also filled with riches extracted from Muslims far in excess of the tributes for the lands they hold—confiscations, illegal gratifications, and other similar taxes collected even more mercilessly than the protection tax.[1]

Ghazālī maintained that since the riches amassed by the kings were either unlawful or at least dubious from the standpoint of the Sharīʿa, it was advisable that no grant or donation out of it be accepted by a scholar. Such an income, he held, was not conducive to the spiritual advancement of the recipient. He further argued that instances of scholars accepting royal grants in the past

1 Ibid., 2:120, 122.

could undoubtedly be cited, but that was a world altogether different from his own. In this connection he writes:

> The despotic rulers of the past, being nearer in time to the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, were at least conscious of their tyrannical ways and hence ever eager to win the favor of the Companions of the Prophet and their associates and descendants. Since these rulers of old were anxious that their favors be accepted by devout scholars, they made these presentations of their own accord and without any strings attached. They even expressed gratitude for the acceptance of their grants. The devout, for their part, accepted these presentations only to distribute them among the poor and needy. At the same time, these mentors of old never sided with the rulers in the furtherance of their political ends. They never paid visits to kings and chieftains, nor did they ever encourage the latter to call upon them. It was not infrequently that they warned the kings for their irreligious actions or even cursed them for their tyrannical ways. These scholars thus accepted the presentation of their rulers because there was no danger of any harmful effect to the faith on account of it.
>
> Kings nowadays, however, have only such scholars on their payrolls as they hope to win over to their side for certain ulterior motives or as would be willing to join their entourages and sing their praises. The vices flowing out of the acceptance of such favors are many: First, the recipient has to endure humiliation. Second, he has to pay visits to the donor. Third, he has to lavish praise upon the grantor. Fourth, he is required to help the grantor in realizing his ends. Fifth, he has to dance in attendance upon the ruler like other courtiers. Sixth, he has always to express gratitude and assure the grantor of his help. And seventh, he has to hold his tongue over the tyrannies and misdeeds of kings. Rulers nowadays would not extend their help to anybody who is not willing to accept even one of these conditions, no matter if he be a scholar of Shāfi'ī's fame.
>
> It is for these reasons that it is not lawful now for anyone to accept donations from kings, even if one knows them to have derived their income through lawful means. There is absolutely no justification for accepting grants out of revenues gained through prohibited or even doubtful means. Now, if anybody still unashamedly accepts the donations from these rulers and quotes the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ and their successors as a precedent, he perhaps considers the angels in the same category as blacksmiths, for he cannot avoid waiting upon the rulers or even their chiefs and officials and playing second fiddle to them. And these are all sins.
>
> I have now explained the sources of lawful and unlawful income accruing

> to kings. If anybody still deems it practicable to obtain a grant drawn out of lawful revenues, and he also deserves the same or gets it without in any way asking for it or having to ingratiate himself to the king or his chieftains, and the donation does not depend on any service to be rendered in return, then it may be lawful to accept it. But I would still advise in favor of refusal if only for the evils likely to follow its acceptance.[1]

Ghazālī did not merely advise abandoning the donations and grants of kings; he went even further to stress that one ought completely to disassociate oneself from them and detest their tyrannical and despotic ways. He writes in the *Iḥyā'*:

> One should be so completely cut off from kings that he never comes across them. This entails—and indeed safety lies in it—that one detest them for their tyranny. He should never entreat Allāh's blessings for them nor praise them, nor else seek acquaintance of their courtiers. One should not even desire to know anything about them.

We are living in a democratic age wherein freedom of speech and expression has been proclaimed around the world. It is therefore difficult to visualize the amount of courage Ghazālī had to muster and the grave danger he exposed himself to by openly preaching disassociation with the rulers or advising refusal of their grants, and criticizing them for their tyrannical and un-Islamic policies in social, political, and fiscal matters. For despotic and autocratic rulers, as kings generally were in those days, even the slightest criticism of the state or its policies or officials was sufficient as a mark of treason, and the heads of eminent scholars and reputed personages rolled at the merest wish of those tyrants. However, throwing all considerations of personal safety to the winds, Ghazālī preached and practiced what he considered to be right and never faltered from the duty of severely admonishing the arrogant kings of his time.

Sultan Sanjar, the son of the Seljuq sultan Malikshāh, was the governor of Khurasan. Once Ghazālī happened to see him in his court. Addressing Sanjar, he said before his courtiers:

> It is indeed regrettable that the necks of other Muslims are breaking under the crushing burden of your tyranny, while those of your horses are overburdened with expensive harnesses.[2]

1 Ibid. 2:123.

2 Ghazālī, *Maktūbāt*, 19.

Muḥammad, the elder brother of Sanjar, succeeded his father Malikshāh. Ghazālī wrote a detailed letter in the form of a treatise exhorting him to inculcate awe of Allāh, fulfill his obligations as a king, and work for the betterment of his people.[1]

Administration was generally in the hands of ministers in Ghazālī's time. He therefore paid more attention to them than to the Seljuq kings for bringing about administrative reform. He wrote detailed letters and directives calling their attention to the mismanagement, maladministration, inefficiency, illegal exhortation, and high-handedness of state officials. Ghazālī reminded them of their responsibility before Allāh and called their attention to the fate earlier tyrannical rulers and administrators had met as a consequence of their oppressive administrative policies. The letters Ghazālī wrote to the ministers of Seljuq kings reflect his personal courage, his desire for exposing the truth, and the effectiveness of his sharp expression.

In one of his letters to a minister, Fakhr al-Mulk, he wrote:

> You should know that this city [Ṭūs] had been laid waste by famine and tyranny. Everyone was scared by the news of your presence in Esfarayen (Isfarāyin) and Damghan. Farmers sold their produce, and hooligans behaved nicely with the populace. Now that you are far away, fear has taken flight from these people. The bully has again taken heart, and the farmers and grocers are indulging in black-marketeering. Anybody sending you a report contrary to what I have stated is not your well-wisher. . . . Verily, the solemn invocation of the oppressed in Ṭūs would surely be answered by the Lord. I counseled the governor of Ṭūs, but he did not pay any heed to me until an example was made out of him by divine justice. . . . My solemn admonition would undoubtedly appear distasteful to you, but I would not have dared to write this letter if I had not cast all temptations of earthly favors out of my heart. Pay heed to me, for you would not be counseled like this by anyone after me. Only those can admonish you who do not allow their selfishness to conceal the truth.[2]

In a letter to another minister, Mujīr al-Dīn, he says:

> Now that the tyranny has reached its limits, it has become incumbent on you to give succor to the oppressed. I was a witness to this state of affairs for a year or so. I then migrated from Ṭūs in order to avoid casting a glance over

1 This is called *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* and is in Persian.

2 *Maktūbāt*, 36–38.

> those ignoble oppressors. Now that I have returned to Ṭūs, I find that the oppression is still continuing.[1]

After drawing Mujīr al-Dīn's attention to the despicable fate met by earlier ministers, Ghazālī continues:

> The ministers before you met a fate which none had met before them. But now I see oppression and destruction that I had never witnessed before. You may not be pleased with this state of affairs, but when these oppressors are called up on the Day of Judgement, everyone responsible for their tyranny, even in the remotest possible way, will be asked to render an explanation for it. The Muslims of this place are extremely aggrieved. The officials have collected quite a substantial amount from the populace, many times more than the money sent by you for distribution to the poor, but it has not been remitted to the king. These people have misappropriated the entire amount.[2]

Other Classes of Muslim Society

Ghazālī had also made a deep study of the religious and moral life of the other sections of society besides the scholars, kings, and chieftains. He has left a detailed description of numerous innovations and deviations, customs and rites—in short, all aspects of mundane life which had somehow or other found a place in the life of the different sections of contemporary society. It is remarkable that, in addition to being a profound academic scholar of religion, Ghazālī was also such a keen observer of society that no aspect of popular life escaped his attention. He devotes one section of the *Iḥyā'* to such customs as violate the dictates of the Sharīʿa but do not apparently seem to do so. In this section he leaves untouched no aspect of individual or communal life—from the mosque to the market, from the baths to the social spaces—and enumerates the practices that are prohibited and ought to be given up.[3]

Another section of the book deals with those people who were suffering from one or another misconception that impeded the improvement of their character. This section is concerned with the people who suffer from different types of self-deceptions, weaknesses, fallacies, illusions, and paradoxes. The survey includes the affluent, nobles, scholars, mystics, and similar other classes of rank and distinction, exhibiting a penetrating insight into their mental and emotional life to be expected only from an expert psychologist.

1 *Maktūbāt*, 62–63.

2 *Maktūbāt*, 67.

3 *Iḥyā'*, 2:294–299.

His study uncovers misgivings and illusions which the people concerned would hardly have been aware of themselves.

Scholars in Ghazālī's time, on the whole, had developed a kind of extremism in the cultivation and practice of their disciplines that obscured the essence of true faith from view. Jurists stretched their legal quibbling too far to include all sorts of futile juristic issues; dialecticians deemed it worthwhile to engage in specious reasoning and irrelevant polemics; ḥadīth scholars busied themselves with unnecessary researches into the terms and phrases (and their derivatives) used in ḥadīths; meanwhile mystics considered it an act of devotion to commit the writings of their masters to memory. Ghazālī vigorously criticized all these people and brought out succinctly the misconceptions under which they were laboring. Summing up the discussion in this regard, he writes:

> The secular sciences pertaining to mathematics, medicine, and other useful arts do not produce so much self-deception among their students as is born out of the religious sciences. This is because nobody ever thinks of the former branches of learning as a means of attaining salvation in the Hereafter, whereas the study itself of religious sciences, apart from its true aim and the ultimate result desired of it, is very often taken as leading to salvation.[1]

Along with the religious scholars, Ghazālī brought the pious and the mystics too under the focus of his criticism. In highlighting their mistakes and misconceptions, self-deceptions and the show of assumed piety, Ghazālī disclosed how a number of devotional practices were really unimportant and worthless, and that the motive behind several of these devotional acts was not a sincere desire to serve Allāh but simply to satisfy one's own self or others or to seek adoration and honor.[2]

Turning to the affluent and well-to-do sections of the society, Ghazālī makes certain pertinent observations of far-reaching importance:

> There are many among the men of means who are too liberal in spending their wealth on the performance of ḥajj. They set out for the pilgrimage regularly year after year as if they have none hungry or in want among their neighbors. ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd ﷺ said that in later times quite a large number of people would perform the ḥajj unnecessarily, simply because they would find it easy to travel and would have enough to spend; but they would return from the

1 Ibid., 3:343.

2 Ibid., 3:345–350.

ḥajj without any recompense, for they would not help their fellow travellers whom they find in trouble.

Abū'l-Naṣr al-Tammār relates that somebody informed Bishr ibn al-Ḥārith of his intention to set out for ḥajj. Bishr asked, "What have you got to meet the expenses?" The man replied, "Two thousand dirhams." "And what is the purpose of your journey?" demanded Bishr again. "Do you want to make a show of your piety, visit the Ka'ba, or seek the pleasure of Allāh?" The man replied, "To seek the pleasure or Allāh." "Very well," said Bishr, "but would you agree if I tell you a method whereby you would attain the pleasure of Allāh without having to go all the way for ḥajj? You would undoubtedly spend the money you have, but you would also be satisfied that you have done something that would be pleasing to the Lord."

When the man said yes, Bishr told him, "You should distribute the amount you have set aside for the ḥajj among ten insolvent persons so that they may pay off their debts, or to paupers who may live on it, or to orphans or persons in indigent circumstances. If you like, you may give the entire amount to a single person. Rendering help to the poor or the needy or anyone in trouble is better than performing a hundred voluntary pilgrimages. Now you should do as I have told you, but if you have any hesitation, tell me about it." "The truth is," the man rejoined, "that I want to undertake the journey." Bishr smiled and remarked, "When the money is obtained from prohibited or doubtful sources, the insinuating self of man urges him to gratify its desires, which it often brings forth in the garb of virtuous acts to deceive him. Allāh Almighty has, however, decided that He would accept the deeds of only those who fear Him."[1]

Another group among the moneyed but miserly is more interested in such devotional acts on which nothing is to be spent. They like to keep fast, offer prayers, or recite the Qur'ān. These persons, too, are deceiving themselves because stinginess has captured their souls. They ought to spend their money in order to cure themselves of the malady, but they keep themselves busy in acts that are really not required of them. These people are like the man who is about to be bitten by a snake that will undoubtedly kill him, but instead keeps himself busy in preparing a syrup for relieving his cough. These misers do not stand in need of the aforesaid devotional acts just as this foolish man would not be cured of the snakebite by his syrup. Once somebody told Bishr that a certain rich man was profusely keeping fast and offering prayer. He replied, "The poor fellow is doing the work of others but has given up his own.

1 Ibid., 3:351–352.

He was required to feed the hungry and help the poor. Instead, he is forcing himself to remain hungry and is trying to help himself by offering voluntary prayers. Along with this, he is also busy in accumulating as much wealth as possible so as to exclude the poor from it."[1]

Regarding another delusion from which people generally suffer, Ghazālī says:

There are still others, both among the rich and the poor, who are victims of self-deception, for they consider it sufficient enough to attend the religious discourses and sermons. They regularly attend such gatherings and think that it is propitious to listen to these discourses even without acting on the counsel of the preachers. These persons are deceiving themselves because the merit of these sermons lies simply in exhortation to adopt the righteous course. But if sermons create no urge for virtuous action, they are simply of no value. Anything used as a means for achieving an end has importance because of its objective, and if it cannot somehow be helpful in achieving the object it becomes worthless. But these persons are led astray by the merit of listening to such discourses, unduly emphasized by certain preachers. Often such listeners are found in ecstasy or even in a flood of tears during the discourses, but they never make up their mind to tread the righteous path. If these persons are told something dreadful, they begin to implore Allāh and seek His protection, but they appear to think that it is all they need to propitiate the Lord. It is nothing but delusion. Such a person is like a patient who consults a physician simply to know the prescription but never to regain health. Or he resembles one who is hungry but cannot fill his belly merely by learning the names of different foods.

Being attentive to preachers and to the details of doctrines and devotional practices would likewise be of no avail in the life to come unless it makes you change your life and pattern it so as to inculcate awe and remembrance of Allāh. If sermons do not produce this effect and do not make you weary of this world, they will be brought as evidence against you in the next. Verily, if you think that simply listening to these sermons would be enough for your salvation, you are deceiving yourself.[2]

Purpose of the Iḥyā'

Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn is not merely a book of criticism. One of the book's underlying objectives is to reform and re-Islamize the Muslim society. Ghazālī really intended to produce a work that might be self-sufficient not only for the

1 Ibid., 3:352.

2 Ibid.

education and discipline of the truth seeker but also to produce an adequate guidebook for educators and preachers, to serve as an encyclopedia of Islamic sciences, and maybe to be used as a manual of instruction for the Islamic way of life. He succeeded in making the book a digest of Islamic beliefs and practices,[1] with measures for purifying the soul, disciplining moral conduct, and cultivating a mystical awareness of the truth. The most striking aspect of the book is its effectiveness. Many of us have likely shared the experience of Shiblī Nuʿmānī, who said that every word of this book has a magnetic effect on its reader; it takes hold of him and pulls on the heartstrings. This overwhelming effect of the *Iḥyā'* is perhaps because it was written by Ghazālī at a time when he was himself filled and deeply impressed with a feeling of higher awakening.[2]

The inner experience of unseen realities that give insight into the higher realms, through which Ghazālī had himself passed and which is reflected in the *Iḥyā'*, sometimes leaves readers disenchanted with the world. The book creates an extreme longing for solitude and asceticism, contemplation and devotion, and produces an awe and reverence of Allāh peculiar to the mystic way of life that is often harmful for the health. The writer of these pages has himself experienced these feelings while going through the *Iḥyā'* for the compilation of this book. It is perhaps for this reason that many spiritual guides do not advise the novice to go through the *Iḥyā'* in the initial stages. Perfect moderation and temperance can indeed be had only through the study of the ḥadīth and the biography of the Prophet ﷺ and the company of a religious teacher who has modeled his life in accordance with the teachings of the Sharīʿa.

Ethical Philosophy of Ghazālī

Besides being an eminent, jurist, theologian, and a mystic, Ghazālī was also a proponent of Islamic ethics. His studies in ethical philosophy fathom the mysteries of mind and heart and exhibit a penetrating insight into the eternal values of life. In fact, Ghazālī has left such an indelible mark on subsequent thought in the discipline that no study of Islamic ethics and ethical philosophy can be complete without a mention of Ghazālī and his writings on the subject.[3] The *Iḥyā'* is a feat on this subject as well. In it, like a true

1 The *fiqh* therein is primarily based on the Shāfiʿī school, the school Ghazālī followed.

2 Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghazālī*, 33.

3 For this, see Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Tārīkh al-Akhlāq*, 200. See also his *Falsafat al-Akhlāq*.

thinker, Ghazālī sets out to examine the innate psychological dispositions and impulses actuating ethical behavior.

Yearning for Honor

Under the heading "Why man has a natural longing for celebrity (*jāh*) and why it seldom leaves even the heart of the one given to struggle," Ghazālī writes in the *Iḥyā'*,

> One must know that in the same way man desires wealth, man also has a deep craving for celebrity. Just as gold is liked more than silver, even if the two are of the same value, celebrity claims precedence over riches. As you know, gold and silver have no attraction in themselves, for these can neither satisfy hunger or thirst, nor be worn as garments. These are just as good as any other metal, but they have an all allure because they serve to satisfy desires held dearer by man. Similar is the case with celebrity, which serves to win and dominate the heart of others.
>
> However, even though celebrity and wealth share man's fancy equally, the former claims precedence over the other for multiple reasons, of which three stand out. The first is that celebrity can be a means for attaining riches, while wealth may not help in commanding the respect of others. Anybody winning the hearts of others wins their service and possessions too, as people are always desirous of making presentations to those whom they love and revere. On the other hand, if an undistinguished common man somehow gets hold of a treasure, he cannot win the respect of others merely by getting rich. Celebrity is thus held dearer than wealth. Another obvious reason is that there is always a danger of losing wealth. It can be stolen or taken away forcibly. Kings and tyrants can confiscate it, and it needs to be guarded and kept in strongboxes and safe rooms. But once a man wins another's heart, there is no danger of losing it to thieves, robbers, or plunderers. It is indeed the best-guarded treasure. The treasure of the heart is immune from all such dangers.
>
> The third reason for holding celebrity dearer is that it goes on increasing by itself without any effort. When people begin to venerate anyone on account of his knowledge or virtuous actions, they sing his praise and thereby widen the circle of his followers. It is thus only natural that everybody should hanker after fame and honor. When fame spreads to other towns and lands, the number of admirers increases with it. As against this, wealth does not increase by itself. These are the manifest reasons for giving preference to celebrity over wealth. One can also find many other reasons for it.

Now, it can be argued that if what I have explained here is correct, a man should like to have riches or celebrity only to the extent of fulfilling his desires or meeting his wants, for he holds these things dear only for achieving such ends. But the fact is that the covetousness of man knows no bounds, and he goes on accumulating possessions and riches till the limits of his needs are left far behind and he presents the spectacle of one alluded to in the ḥadīth which says, "If a man had two valleys filled with gold, he would long for the third." Similarly, a man is always anxious that his celebrity should go on increasing till his fame reaches far-off lands, even if he knows that he will never step foot in those countries and meet their inhabitants.

The answer to the question posed earlier is that, in truth, love of celebrity produces an intoxication that can hardly be eradicated. There are two reasons for this. One is manifest and can be perceived by everyone. But the other one, related to a peculiar trait of the human self, is so subtle and latent that it would be difficult even for the most intelligent to grasp it fully. It can be understood only by those who are endowed by the brilliance of mind and have a deep insight into the psychological nature of man.

The first of the two causes is that man always feels an innate uneasiness, beset by fears and doubts regarding what he holds dear, and accordingly wants to ward off all dangers from it, whether real or imaginary. As a poet says, "To fall in love is to fall in a thousand anxieties." Man is never satisfied, no matter what provisions he has made to meet his necessities. The doubt that he might later lose his possessions constantly assails his heart and makes him sad and anxious. This anxiety can be removed only if he gets something to substitute for the possessions he fears to lose. Again on account of his self-love and eagerness for long life, he overestimates his necessities for the future and wants adequate resources to counterbalance the imaginary threats to his things. He is always worried about the supposed hazards that might make him lose what he has. The only effective remedy he can think of against these risks is to amass so great a stock of possessions that if he somehow loses a part of it, he may be able to manage easily with what remains. Doubt and fear about future security never allow him to be content with his existing belongings, and he yields to the desire of possessing the fortunes of the entire world. The Prophet of Islam ﷺ has very rightly said that the longing for two things, knowledge and wealth, is never satisfied. The desire for celebrity, or winning the hearts of men, is insatiable for precisely the same reason.

The other reason, and the more cogent, is that the spirit (*rūḥ*) is a command by Allāh. The Qur'ān says, "They will ask you concerning the spirit. Say: The

spirit is by command of my Lord" (Q 17:85). "By command of [the] Lord" means that it is a secret that can be experienced by the illuminated masters through spiritual visions but cannot be divulged. The Prophet of Islam too did not disclose the reality of the spirit, but without going into its reality, one can find out that the heart of man has a fourfold predisposition. The first is a carnal inclination toward eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, etc. The second is what may be called a violent tendency toward killing, injuring, and hurting others. The third element of human nature is the devilish inclination toward deceit and fraud. Along with these, there is then a fourth relating to the godly nature of man, which seeks expression in divine attributes like beneficence, dignity, grandeur, respect, and glory. The heart of man has numerous similar predispositions that we cannot go into in any detail here; but as stated, one of the important inclinations of the heart, owing to the spirit being a command by the Lord, pertains to the quality of perfection. And what is this perfection? It consists of being unrivaled in perfection and owning an existence not dependent on another for anything.

Man is thus naturally inclined to perfection since it is a divine quality, a quality that does not admit of any peer or rival, for that would really constitute a defect in perfection. The perfection of the sun lies in that it is the only sun. Likewise, the perfection of being is enjoyed by Allāh Almighty alone, for there is no perfect being besides Him. Whatever exists besides Him is simply His creation and cannot exist on its own. Thus, in truth, nothing exists without Allāh, for sharing any quality with Him suggests an equal to Allāh Almighty, which would be a defect in His unrivaled perfection. Just as the sun illuminates everything in this world without losing its perfection, Allāh also bestows existence upon everything. It is on Him that depends the existence of everything in this universe. Unrivaled perfection is thus a divine attribute to which man has a natural yearning. Some mystics have observed that in the recesses of the heart, everyone nourishes the same feeling that found expression from Pharaoh when he said, "I am your Lord, Most high" (Q 79:24). It is for this reason that man finds it more pleasing to become an object of homage and reverence than to become himself a devotee or a worshipper. This is the natural human instinct alluded to in the divine revelation that says the "spirit is by command of My Lord."

Man cannot, however, attain absolute or unrivaled perfection, but his desire for it persists because he derives some satisfaction from the chase. Absolute perfection is the end and not the means of achieving something else. The fact is that every man adores his self as well as its absolute perfection, and

he shudders at the idea of death simply because he sees in it the ruin of his self and of its perfection. Absolute perfection for the self demands complete independence from everything while at the same time requiring the utter dependency of all other things on it. If that is not possible, the next most desirable course is to dominate others. Man, desiring complete perfection, has thus a natural inclination toward dominance over others. Domination over others is gratifying to the self and a means of achieving perfection. It consists of the capacity to be effective and the ability to make others change their will. Accordingly, man wants to dominate all beings, but the latter category includes such beings as do not change according to the will of man— as, for instance, the Supreme Being and His attributes.

There is another category of beings that undergo change, though not in conformity with human desire. These are the heavens, planets, angels, jinn, devils, mountains, oceans, and the like. The beings falling in the third category, such as land, its elements, minerals, plants, animals, and also the hearts of men, are liable to change under the influence of human will. Now, because the first two categories fall outside the scope of human influence, man endeavors to acquire knowledge of these things; for acquiring the knowledge of anything is a means of gaining domination over it. You see the keenness of some people to possess insight into the reality of the nature and attributes of Allāh, or that of the angels, heavens, planets, stars, oceans, and their wonders. This is also a way of acquiring some domination over them. You would have seen that if one cannot himself manufacture something that catches his fascination, he wants at least to know how it has been made, as this gives him some satisfaction. A man who cannot himself invent a game like chess or any other device, wants at least to know how it is played or used and how it was invented. Not knowing vexes him and knowing entices him; he wishes to make up for some of his own deficiency through his knowledge.

Of the earthly things over which man desires dominance in order to use them according to his wishes, there are two subdivisions: those pertaining to the body and those pertaining to the spirit. The first comprises possessions and belongings, wealth and resources over which man wants complete control. He wants complete authority to use these in whatever way he desires because authority is necessary for perfection. Dominance is one of the attributes of Allāh reflecting His qualities of lordship. Man has a natural inclination to hold these dear to his heart no matter whether he ever needs them for meeting his personal requirements or not. Similarly, man wants to possess slaves who will be under his domination, or to force even free people to accept his dominance

and thereby command their homage and service. It is not necessary that he always win over their hearts, as mostly, they have no love or respect for him in their hearts. However, domination by force is often as effective as winning over the heart, because he finds pleasure in this control. It is therefore natural that he sometimes desires to achieve dominance through brute force because it expresses his authority over others—a feeling to which man is predisposed.

The most precious of all earthly possessions falling under the second category, then, is dominating and winning over the hearts of men. The perfection of domination lies in the authority one exercises over the hearts of others who are ever willing to comply with his bidding. The hearts of men are most easily dominated by engendering the love and reverence accompanying the conviction that the one adored possesses the most perfect qualities. For perfection of qualities is a divine attribute to which man has an inherent inclination. The heart of man, therefore, desires to attain perfection either through knowledge or authority. Wealth and celebrity, the two potent means of acquiring this authority, are cherished in the heart of man. And because knowledge and authority are limitless, man endeavors to gain knowledge of everything and command authority over all that exists. As the Prophet ﷺ has suggested, the dissatisfaction of the learned and the wealthy and the desire of man for domination over things beyond his control goes on, ever increasing.[1]

Introspection and Self-Critique

The most effective part of the *Iḥyā'* is where Ghazālī expounds the significance of purifying one's own soul and reforming one's morals for achieving blessedness. His exposition covers the fleeting nature of the terrestrial world, eternity of the world to come, significance of faith and righteous action, cleansing of the spirit, and eradication of the vices of heart, which he deems to be the inner bases of all grossness in human conduct. Ghazālī's graphic description of vice and virtue and his exhortation to adopt the course leading to salvation bear the mark of an eloquent speaker, a prudent mentor, and a philosopher with an incisiveness of intellect and a penetrating insight into the inner recesses of the human soul, mind, and spirit. He is fully aware of the different types of human weaknesses and delineates each of these, sets forth their causes, and traces their origin, and thereafter proceeds to suggest measures for subjugating the earthly appetites and impulses out of which these vices are born. His treatment of ethical issues does not amount to a

1 *Iḥyā'*, 3:241–244 (summarized).

mere moralizing discourse. His essays are inspiring, employing rich and expressive language that has since cast its spell over hundreds of thousands of people and reformed their lives. The fourth section of the book sets out a critique of the self (*nafs*) and a method of self-examination. He tells us how one should assess one's own vices and inclination toward them and prepare for the life to come.

Under the heading "Self-censure," Ghazālī writes:

> O Self! Is it the right course that when a Jew [or a person of any religion] tells you that a certain thing is injurious for your health, you abandon it and prefer to curb your desire, but completely disregard the commands of divine revelation and the directives of the prophets, whose truthfulness is established by miracles? It is not surprising that you attach more weight to the opinion of that Jew even as he is liable to form an erroneous opinion on account of his limited knowledge or wisdom? You throw away your garment without the slightest hesitation if even a child informs you that a scorpion has got into your clothes. Is it that the tidings of the prophets, scholars, saints, and mentors about the life to come, about Hell and its blazing fire, its torments, its bitter thorny fruits, its scorpions and reptiles, do not deserve even as much credence as the information given by a child? Or is it that the reptiles of Hellfire shall cause you smaller pain than the sting of an earthly scorpion that gives you trouble for a day or less? This is certainly not the way dictated by prudence. If the beasts were to know of your foolishness, they would laugh at you.
>
> O Self! You know what is to happen after death and have faith also in the life to come, but you still refuse to act righteously and wish to ignore the Hereafter. Death is marking time to come upon you and impound your soul without any warning. Even if a hundred years were given, one shall never reach the destination if one discontinues the journey to bask in the sunshine. And what do you think of a man who goes abroad for acquiring knowledge but continues to postpone his studies in the hope that he would learn everything within the last few months before returning home? You would doubtless laugh at this man for hoping to acquire all knowledge and wisdom in such a short time, as you would also at a man who cherishes a desire to be appointed as a jurist without studying law. If you have presumed that the endeavors made in old age are more fruitful, how do you think that this is not the last day of your life? Why do you not then address yourself to the task now? Has Allāh told you that He would allow you some more time to make preparations for your salvation? If not, then what is preventing you from making haste and

prompting you to postpone your decision indefinitely? There is no other reason save that you find it difficult to subjugate your impulses and earthly desires, for that would involve an effort on your part.

Do you then wait for the day when it will be made easier for every man to conquer his desires? Verily, such a day shall never come because Allāh has not created it. Paradise, surrounded as it is by things unpleasant and unwelcome, shall never be agreeable to the indolent self that always wants to postpone today's work to tomorrow. Do you know how many tomorrows have been turned into yesterday? Will it not be even harder to accomplish tomorrow what cannot be done today? Take, for instance, the urge for sex. If uncurbed today, it cannot be stopped tomorrow, or else it is like a tree that a man wants to uproot but, being unsuccessful in his attempt, postpones for the future. This man knows well that with the passage of time, the tree will take root more firmly, while he will become older and grow weaker. Obviously, this man would not be able to accomplish in old age what he could not do in the prime of youth. To put a bridle on the passions is really as difficult and troublesome as to train a wolf.

O Self! You appear not to know these facts of common experience but claim to be wise and prudent. Verily, there appears to be none more foolish than you. Your passions, you might plead, do not allow you to be steadfast in virtue, while troubles and afflictions make you abandon the path of patience. If this is correct, why do you not seek the pleasure that is everlasting, pure, and sublime, and which can be had in the celestial abode of bliss alone. If you are a slave of your desires and mad after pleasure, it is even more desirable for you to curb your fleeting predilections, for sometimes one morsel taken by a man prevents him from taking his food for days on end. Suppose a patient has been directed by his physician not to take cold water for three days so that he might recover from illness. Tell me, what does your intellect dictate? Should this man abstain from cold drink for three days to regain his health, or should he disregard the result and satisfy his craving for cold water? Do you not know that the pitifully short duration of life vouchsafed to you in this transient world, as compared with the eternal life in the Hereafter, is even more short-lived than the three days of that patient as compared with the rest of his life? Is it that the endurance required for controlling earthly passions is more agonising than the torments of indefinite duration in different portals of Hellfire? How would you be able to put up with that everlasting torture when you find it so distasteful to bear this temporary unpleasantness?

I find that you are unable to restrain yourself just for two reasons. The

first of these is a sort of concealed infidelity, while the other is nothing but stupidity. Your concealed infidelity is a lack of conviction about the Day of Judgement and about recompense of your deeds in the world to come. Your stupidity, on the other hand, makes you oblivious to the designs of Allāh and asks you to depend on His mercy while disregarding that the benefits conferred on the obstinate sinners are really snares to trap them. Still, you would not trust His beneficence for a piece of bread or a handful of grain nor follow even the express commands He has enjoined. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Prudent is he who resorts to self-criticism and endeavors to prepare for the life after death, while foolish is he who allows himself to take after the ways of whim and still remain hopeful of divine favor." Alas, you should have been aware of the snare of your passions and should not have allowed yourself to be duped by Satan. You have been asked to take care of yourself and be charitable unto you. You should not waste the sojourn of your life on this transient world. If you lose a moment of this life, you will lose a substantial portion of your fortune in the Hereafter that can never be regained. Therefore, in preparation for the Hereafter, take advantage of your health before your infirmity; of your free time before you preoccupation; of your wealth before your poverty; of your youthful zest before old age saps your strength; and of your life before death overtakes you.

Your endeavor should be commensurate with the everlasting life to come. Do you not, O self, make preparations for the winter season? Do you disregard collecting necessary provisions for it or ignore the winter season in the vain hope of somehow getting through it? Do you think that the intense cold of Hell would be less painful than the wintry cold of this world? Do you hope to attain salvation without making any effort for it? You ought to know that you cannot save yourself from the blazing fire of Hell without the protection of faith and of submission to the commandments of Allāh, exactly in the same way you require warm clothes and heat for protection against the winter cold. It is simply a blessing and a mercy from your Lord that He has informed you how to save yourself from the torments of Hellfire and also provided you with the means for it. It is a divine dispensation that if He creates winter, He also provides heat for you and lets you know how to produce it from flint so that you may be able to protect yourself from the cold. The Lord needs your prayers and supplications as much as He stands in need of your producing fire or weaving woolen cloth. It is really you who need these, not Allāh Almighty; for you have to submit to the will of Allāh for your own salvation. The decision of Allāh is manifest: "Whoso does right,

> it is for his soul, and whoso does wrong, it is against it. And afterwards unto your Lord you will be brought back" (Q 45:15). Woe be to you, O self! Come out of the shroud of your own ignorance and know that your recompense shall be exactly what you earn in this world; for Allāh Almighty has already ordained thus: "Your creation and your resurrection are only as of a single soul. Lo! Allāh is the Hearer, the Knower" (Q 31:28), "As we began the first creation, We shall repeat it" (Q 21:104), and "As He brought you into being, so shall you return" (Q 7:29).[1]

Critics of the Iḥyā'

Ibn Taymiyya's verdict on the *Iḥyā'* is that it is, on the whole, a well-written book with an elegant style: "The majority of what he says in the *Iḥyā'* is excellent."[2] At the same time, he criticized the work on four counts. The first is that Ghazālī's thought shows definite traces of Greek philosophy. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that in his delineation of the oneness of Allāh, prophecy, and the final recompense, numerous concepts held by the philosophers crept in. Even if Ghazālī opposed them, some of their ideas are still be noticeable in his work. Ibn Taymiyya was emphatically opposed to philosophy, so it is no surprise that he deemed some of Ghazālī's writings untenable from a purely religious point of view.

The second grounds for criticism of the *Iḥyā'* is that Ghazālī expounds certain theological issues that, to Ibn Taymiyya, are not fully in keeping with the spirit of the Qur'ān and the Sunna. The third is that the book contains some extreme and erroneous opinions of the mystics. The fourth, he says, is that the *Iḥyā'* contains many weak and even fabricated narrations.[3] Despite these shortcomings, Ibn Taymiyya writes about the *Iḥyā'*:

> Notwithstanding these defects, the *Iḥyā'* contains teachings of numerous illuminated guides and mystics and their experiences in regard to self-purification and intuitive knowledge that conform with the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and can thus be acceptable from a theological point of view. It is for this reason that scholars hold different opinions about the *Iḥyā'* and all of them are not opposed to it.[4]

Ibn al-Jawzī also criticized Ghazālī for using inauthentic and weak ḥadīths.

1 Ibid., 4:356–358.
2 *Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya*, 2:194.
3 Ibid., Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, *Al-Tāj al-Mukallal*, 388.
4 *Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām*, 2:194.

He is of the opinion that this was because Ghazālī was not a ḥadīth scholar.[1] Ḥāfiẓ Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī later collected all the ḥadīth mentioned in the *Iḥyā'* and classified them according to the accepted norms and examined the authenticity of each narration. Ibn al-Jawzī has also pointed out certain mistakes made by Ghazālī in the historical events he mentions in the *Iḥyā'*. This indicates that Ghazālī did not have the opportunity to study history and ḥadīth in detail.[2]

Ibn al-Jawzī maintained that Ghazālī mentioned several examples of mystics or methods used by them for struggle and self-purification that cannot be held permissible under the Sharīʿa, much less recommended to people.[3] But he acknowledged the effectiveness of the *Iḥyā'* and the valuable contribution it has made to subsequent Islamic thought. He has also summarized the *Iḥyā'* in a book entitled *Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn* (Path of the Truth Seekers), in which he removed the portions he deemed objectionable. This work of Ibn al-Jawzī, however, lacks the inspiration and effectiveness so characteristic of the *Iḥyā'*.

Ghazālī and Theology (ʿIlm al-Kalām)

A man of Ghazālī's outstanding intellectual gifts could not continue to tread the beaten path of earlier theologians, nor could he be content with the position of a mere commentator. Unfortunately, the science of theology, which had been developed for the defense of religion and which had to keep itself abreast of current developments in other branches of learning, had lost its vigor by the end of the fourth/tenth century. The Ashʿarīs of the time had taken the path of rigid dogmatism, insisting on the acceptance of not simply their tenets and beliefs but also the canons devised by Imām Ashʿarī and ʿAllāma Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī without the slightest modification or improvement. They considered it heretical to employ a logical syllogism not used by the earlier teachers of their school for the defense of religion.

Ghazālī pressed his knowledge of philosophy for upholding fundamental religious precepts and devised new proofs and premises for the rational exposition of these matters that were more effective than the arguments of the Ashʿarīs. On matters like the divine attributes, prophecy, miracles, religious practices, punishment and reward in the Hereafter, and the Day of Judgment, he brought forth entirely new arguments, more convincing and satisfying to the common mind, than those employed by his predecessors.

1 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam*, 9:169–170.

2 Ibid., 170.

3 Ibid.

He infused the old Ashʿarī school with new blood. The Ashʿarīs should have been thankful to Ghazālī for the revival of their methodology. But because Ghazālī's methodology was somewhat different and he held slightly divergent views from Ashʿarī and other eminent scholars of that school on several issues, many ardent Ashʿarīs viewed Ghazālī's thoughts with suspicion. Some zealous Ashʿarīs even accused Ghazālī of breaking away from orthodoxy and adopting heretical tenets. After the compilation of the *Iḥyā'*, the Ashʿarīs became so critical of Ghazālī that one of his friends wrote a letter to call his attention to the matter. Ghazālī explained the position in some detail in a short book called *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa 'l-Zandaqa* (The Definitive Criterion between Islam and Heresy). He writes in it:

> Dear brother: A group of people envious of me is busy censuring my writings, for, in their opinion, I have expounded views contrary to those held by the great theologians. They think that even the slightest deviation from Ashʿarī's tenets is blasphemous. I know that you are unhappy about it, but, my dear friend, you ought to observe patience in this matter. How can I claim immunity from the jealousy of these people when even the Prophet of Islam ﷺ was not spared by these elements. . . . He is simply a blind follower of illiberal formalism who views heretical any disagreement with the Ashʿarīs, the Muʿtazilīs, the Ḥanbalīs, or, for that matter, any other sect. It is no use trying to waste your time satisfying them.
>
> In fact, their own pleas against one another are sufficient to confute them. There are numerous differences in the various theological schools, and many of them differ from the Ashʿarīs. Therefore, if anybody claims that it is incumbent to follow the Ashʿarī tenets to the last detail, or that even the slightest deviation from those doctrines is unsanctified, he ought to be asked how he deems the Ashʿarīs to be the sole repository of truth. If it is so, would he be willing to declare Bāqillānī an apostate? Bāqillānī differed from Imām Ashʿarī on the attribute of everlastingness (*baqā'*), for he denied the existence of such an attribute extraneous to the essence of Allāh. But the question is, Why should Bāqillānī at all be condemned as an apostate for opposing Ashʿarī? Why should not the same charge be leveled against Ashʿarī? Why should truth be considered the monopoly of any one person? If their reply is that Ashʿarī preceded Bāqillānī, then did not the Muʿtazilīs precede Ashʿarī, and should they not therefore be deemed to be on the right path? If it is claimed that righteousness depends on profound knowledge and piety, then what would be the criteria for judging the comparative merits of the expounders of dif-

> ferent schools? If Bāqillānī was allowed to differ from Ashʿarī, why should those after him be debarred from this right, and why should any particular person be accorded special treatment in this matter?[1]

Personal experience and a comprehensive insight into the speculative as well as religious sciences led Ghazālī to the conclusion that scholastic theology has only limited utility that may sometimes be even harmful in particular cases. He ultimately came to regard theology as a medicine that should not be administered to healthy people who did not need it. Sufficient nourishment could be provided amply through the Qur'ān. He maintained that the Qur'ān contained a superior logic, as its arguments are quite satisfying to people with common sense. In his last book, *Iljām al-ʿAwāmm ʿan ʿIlm al-Kalām* (The Restraining of the Laity from the Science of Theology), Ghazālī observes:

> The Qur'ānic arguments are like food that provides nourishment to everyone, while the logical system built up by the theologians is similar to a medicine that can be administered profitably only to a few and may even have harmful effects for others not requiring it. The Qur'ānic reasoning resembles water that can be taken both by the weak child and the robust youth, while theological argumentation is like a rich food that provides nourishment to the latter but is indigestible and even harmful to the former.[2]

Continuing on the evil effects of dialectics, he writes:

> The proof that people have been harmed by polemical theology is clear through observation and experience and through the rise of many evils that were not to be found during the times of the Prophet's Companions.[3]

Ghazālī's Refusal to Return to Baghdad

Ghazālī was prevailed upon by Fakhr al-Mulk, the son of Niẓām al-Mulk, who had become vizier to the Seljuq prince Sanjar, to return to Nishapur in the month of Dhū 'l-Qaʿda 499/1106, and resume the chief professorship at the Niẓāmiyya College. But Fakhr al-Mulk was assassinated in the beginning of 500/1107 by a Bāṭinī emissary, and Ghazālī abandoned teaching shortly thereafter. He returned to his native town of Ṭūs and founded a small *madrasa* and spiritual retreat for the teaching of his local disciples and their religious life.

The Seljuq sultan Muḥammad appointed Aḥmad I, the elder son of Niẓām

1 Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa*, 6–8, 11–14.

2 Ghazālī, *Iljām al-ʿAwāmm*, 20.

3 Ibid.

al-Mulk, as his vizier in 500/1107, who again requested Ghazālī to resume his post at the Niẓāmiyya College, which had been filled only provisionally. There was in fact hardly anyone in the world of Islam who could replace Ghazālī. The Niẓāmiyya College at Baghdad was the adornment of the Abbasid Caliphate and Baghdad's medal of honor. Everyone felt the loss suffered by the Niẓāmiyya on account of Ghazālī's retirement and was anxious for his return to teaching. Niẓām al-Mulk (Qiwām al-Dīn), the grand vizier to the Seljuq king, himself wrote a letter to Ghazālī expressing the Abbasid caliph's desire that he return to Baghdad. In this letter he wrote:

> I solicited the orders of the caliph in this matter, but these were not granted until Ṣadr al-Dīn[1] took it upon himself that the wishes of the caliph be communicated by him personally to the Most Noble Master, Adornment of the Faith, Proof of Islam, Unique One of the Time (*Khwājā-i Ajall, Zayn al-Dīn, Ḥujjat al-Islām, Farīd al-Zamān*), Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, who is peerless and to whom everyone looks for guidance.[2]

In order to impress upon him that all the courtiers and the chiefs of the caliphate were anxiously awaiting Ghazālī's return, all the high officials of the caliph's court signed the letter. In yet another letter to him, Aḥmad the son of Niẓām al-Mulk wrote, "Though scholars would go to the place where you happen to be present to acquire knowledge from you, it appears reasonable that you should choose for your residence a place which is not only the metropolis of the Islamic world but is also easily accessible from all parts of the empire. And such a place is obviously Baghdad."

In reply to the royal edicts and the letters from his well-wishers, Ghazālī sent a long reply giving his reasons for not returning to his teaching post in Baghdad. He pleaded that a hundred and fifty students receiving education under him in Ṭūs would find it extremely difficult to accompany him all the way to Baghdad. His family, which had not been with him before in Baghdad, would have to face unnecessary hardship if he left Ṭūs again. He also said that in Baghdad it would not be possible for him to remain unconcerned with the polemics and debates that had become the prevailing taste of court life, while he had taken a vow at the Station of Ibrāhīm (*Maqām Ibrāhīm*) in Makka that he would never enter into such futile controversies.

1 Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad, the grandson of Niẓām al-Mulk, was a vizier of the Seljuq prince Sanjar, in whose dominion lay Ṭūs, Ghazālī's native city.

2 Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghazālī*, 27.

Other reasons he gave were that he did not like to visit the caliph nor accept any remuneration from the caliphate, but it would be difficult for him to do without either of these in Baghdad, as he did not possess any landed property in the capital that could support his family. The Abbasid caliph as well as the Seljuq sultan tried their best to persuade Ghazālī to return to Baghdad, but he turned down their requests.[1]

Ghazālī's Death

Ghazālī spent the rest of his life like a student. He had not been able to pay as much attention to ḥadīth as he had to the sacred and secular sciences. He tried, therefore, to recover the shortfall by studying the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works of Bukhārī and Muslim under a reputed ḥadīth scholar of the time, Ḥāfiẓ ʿAmr ibn Abī 'l-Ḥasan al-Rawāsī, under whom he even obtained authorization for the two books. As the historians report, he spent most of his time during this period in the study of ḥadīth. One of his biographers, Ibn ʿAsākir, records:

> During the last days of his life, Ghazālī addressed himself wholeheartedly to the study of ḥadīth. During this period he preferred the company of religious scholars and studied the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī and Muslim, which are deemed to be the most authentic collection of the Sunna.[2]

Ghazālī wrote another book on legal theory, the *Muṣtaṣfā*, just a year or so before he died. This work is still considered one of the three principle works on the subject.[3] Scholars have valued it highly and it was Ghazālī's final work.

Ghazālī died at Ṭabarān on 14 Jūmādā 'l-Ukhrā 505 (18 December 1111) at the age of fifty-five. Ibn al-Jawzī has given a vivid description of Ghazālī's death, as told by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, who was an eyewitness to his brother's remarkable death:

> It was a Monday. He got up in the morning, made his ablution, and performed the dawn prayers. He then asked to bring his shroud. Taking it he kissed it and laid it on his eyes with the words, "I submit to the command of my Master." Then he stretched out his feet in the direction of Kaʿba. When people saw him, he had already passed away.[4]

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1 Ibid., 21.

2 *Tabyīn*, 296.

3 The other two being the *Muʿtamad* of Abū 'l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī and the *Burhān* of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī.

4 Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-Sādat al-Muttaqīn*, 11–12.

Two Outstanding Qualities of Ghazālī

Immaculate sincerity and indomitable courage are the two most impressive qualities of Ghazālī that have been acknowledged by his friends and foes. His writings breathe an almost tragic urgency into his message. Ibn Taymiyya differed with Ghazālī on many Issues, but he had absolutely no doubt of the sincerity of Ghazālī's purpose. The reason behind the effectiveness and the immense popularity of Ghazālī's work was his earnestness and selfless devotion to the truth, which made him abandon the most coveted post at the Niẓāmiyya College, led him to spend a decade in seclusion and contemplation, and, finally, gave him the courage to turn down the invitations of emperors and resist the temptations of riches, honor, and glory. He has written that the evil that comes out last from the heart of a righteous man is the love of celebrity. Ghazālī's life before his death bears witness to the fact that he had attained this stage of self-purification and moral rectitude.

Ghazālī was fired with an adventurous spirit and a lofty idealism that enabled him to set his heart upon an ever higher objective. His work in jurisprudence and legal theory was a beacon of light for the jurists of many centuries to come. Contrary to the normal pattern of education in Ghazālī's time, he studied secular sciences after acquiring mastery over sacred learning. He engaged himself in intensive study of the logic and philosophy of the times and soon acquired, according to Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, such proficiency in these subjects that he challenged them in a way that left their structure shaking for a hundred years.

His spiritual efforts in search of the truth were in no way meaner than his accomplishments in the disciplines of the mind. To purify the self and gain spiritual strength, he turned to the path of mysticism under a reputed spiritual mentor of the time, Shaykh Abū ʿAlī al-Fārmadī (d. 477/1084).[1] He abandoned everything he had, spent a decade in solitude and contemplation, and was favored with spiritual illumination.

Ghazālī's endeavors for the revival and revivification of Islam were not limited to the reformation of Muslim society alone. Shiblī Nuʿmānī has given an account of his efforts to establish a truly Islamic state In Spain. He says:

> Ghazālī was not satisfied with the existing Muslim states that had degenerated into secular governments. He held the view that unless a new state was estab-

1 Abū ʿAlī Faḍl ibn Muḥammad al-Fārmadī was a prominent mystic and preacher from Ṭūs. He is found in the chain of the Naqshbandī Mujaddidī order, in between Abū 'l-Qāsim ibn ʿAlī al-Gurgānī (450/1058) and Khwājā Yūsuf al-Hamadānī (535/1141).

lished in accordance with the Islamic principles of polity, Muslim society could not be re-Islamized. He could not, however, spare time for this stupendous task from his preoccupations of contemplation and struggle, purification of self, and moral rectification. However, after *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* was brought to light and its copies were taken to Spain in 501/1107, the king, ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn ordered them burned.[1] Ghazālī sadly learned of the incident, but shortly thereafter a young man, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn Tūmārt by name, arrived from Spain to study under him.[2] Muḥammad came from a distinguished family, reputed for its long record of eminent warriors. While he was studying under Ghazālī, he had made up his mind, either of his own accord or, most likely, under Ghazālī's influence, to overthrow ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf in order to set up a truly Islamic state in Spain. Although Ghazālī agreed with him, he asked Muḥammad about the means as well as the help he hoped to muster in his venture. Having satisfied himself about the project, Ghazālī allowed Muḥammad to proceed with his undertaking. In regard to Ghazālī's blessing for Muḥammad's enterprise, Ibn Khaldūn says, "As people are generally aware, [Muḥammad] met Ghazālī and consulted him about his venture. Ghazālī approved of his suggestion since Islam had grown weak in the whole world and there was no king who could unite the entire Umma for upholding the cause of Islam. However, Ghazālī first inquired from Muḥammad about the means he had for organizing the uprising and bringing it to a successful end.

The kingdom established by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh ibn Tūmārt, known as the Almohads, or *Muwaḥḥidūn*, lasted for a long time. The reign of ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn, which was notorious for its widespread tyranny, had

1 *Itḥāf al-Sāda*, 1:10.

2 Ibn al-Subkī has given some interesting details about Muḥammad in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*. He says that Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbdillāh was from West Africa. In his youth he first studied locally and then travelled to the East to study jurisprudence and theology. Noted for his simplicity, he strictly followed the dictates of the Sharīʿa. Returning to Egypt after completing his education, he began preaching to the people to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. However, he earned the hostility of the local population because of his uncompromising attitude and was eventually turned out. He then returned to his native land via Alexandria. He arrived In Mahdiyya in 505/1111 and began to preach reform among the Berber tribes. He went to Bajāya and then to Marrakesh on his errand, where he came into conflict with the members of the royal family. ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn summoned him to his court, where he was asked him to explain the reasons for criticizing the king. Undaunted by the pomp and glory of the royal court, he replied, "Is not wine sold freely in this town? Do not people misappropriate the income of the trusts meant for the orphan?" The king was so effected by his speech that he burst into tears. Muḥammad gradually gathered an enormous following around him and before long formed an extensive kingdom with the help of the Berber tribe Maṣmūda (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 4:71–74)

encouraged moral laxity among all classes of society. Abduction and rape of women belonging to respectable families by the king's legionaries had become a common feature of the day. The royal family, descending from a recently converted Berber tribe followed a curious custom. Their men always wore a veil, while their women moved about unrestrained and unveiled. This is why they were called the "veiled ones" (*mulaththamūn*).

Muḥammad ibn Tūmārt, after obtaining power, did not himself ascend the throne but chose a capable and learned young man by the name of ʿAbd al-Mu'min who succeeded the last "veiled" king in 540/1146. ʿAbd al-Mu'min and his descendants ruled over the empire strictly in accordance with the principles that Ghazālī had shows preference for. In his book, in the third section of chapter 3, "About the Berbers," Ibn Khaldūn has given an account of the rule by the Almohads in these words: "During their rule scholars were held in high esteem, and all the affairs of the state were decided in consultation with them. Justice was made available to the weak and the poor; tyrannical officials were severely punished; ruffians were held at the leash; mosques were constructed in royal palaces; the frontier posts were fortified and strengthened and fresh conquests were made."[1]

Impact of Ghazālī

In intellectual and spiritual attainments, brilliance of mind, and expansiveness of knowledge mastered, there have been only a few comparable to Ghazālī. His epoch-making writings provided a source of inspiration to subsequent generations and anticipated a vigorous intellectual movement. Ghazālī in fact left such a deep imprint on the pages of Islamic history that his impact on subsequent Islamic thought has always been acknowledged both by his admirers and detractors. His writings are still held in high esteem and profitably studied by those who yearn for purification of the self and mystic communion with Allāh.

Reformers after Ghazālī

Despite Ghazālī's successful encounter with the scepticism of philosophers that had threatened to cause spiritual chaos in Islam, the moral and spiritual disintegration of the masses toward the end of the fifth/eleventh century had become so widespread that it required a popular movement for the regeneration of the simplicity and directness of the faith. What the Umma

1 *Al-Ghazālī*, 116–117.

needed was an illuminated and inspired mentor who held sway with the people, one who could spellbind and fill them with faith and enthusiasm, zeal and self-confidence. The autocratic governments of the previous four hundred years had definitely had a dissolving influence on the spiritual and moral life of the community. These had produced a class which, although claiming to profess Islam, took self-aggrandizement, acquisition of material success, and pursuit of wealth, power, and honor as its ultimate end. Foreign cultural influences had, on the one hand, made inroads into Muslim society, while, on the other, paganism of pre-Islamic ignorance were again reasserting themselves. The ostentatious, conceited, and dissolute manners of elitist grandees and imperial retinues had become a model for the common folk. Unmindful of the humble and poor, who led a discontented and frustrated life, those who had money to squander were busy in their own pleasure pursuits. The affluent were gradually losing the good qualities of humanity, generosity, and benevolence, while the poorer classes were losing qualities like patience and contentment, confidence and self-respect. Torn between a moral crisis on the one hand and social injustice on the other, Muslim society was threatened with disintegration. What this critical situation demanded was an invigorating call inviting the people back to the faith, cutting at the pulls of worldly temptation and benefit, rekindling the desire for salvation and blessedness, for achievement of the true knowledge of Allāh, and for inculcating an ardent desire to submit oneself to His command. To achieve this it was necessary to impress upon people the true meaning of *tawḥīd*—the oneness of Allāh Almighty—along with an awareness of the fleeting nature of earthly pleasures and the inefficacy of power and wealth.

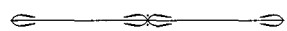
At the same time, the fifth/eleventh century also saw a diffusion of arts and sciences in the world of Islam. We find during this period some of the greatest intellectual leaders brought forth by Islam: Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083) and Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in the field of religious sciences, Abū 'l-Wafā' ibn ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119) and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) in jurisprudence and literature, Abū Zakariyyā al-Tabrīzī (d. 502/1109) in grammar and lexicography, and Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1112) in literature. Each of these was a pioneer in his own field, and every one of them remained unrivaled for centuries to come. During such a period of intellectual awakening, no religious mentor could have hoped to achieve any success unless he was himself well versed in all the prevalent sciences. It was essential that the person should be as recognized for his literary distinction and brilliance of mind as for his spiritual

and moral excellence. This was indeed necessary if he was not to be brushed aside as an illiterate fanatic.

These were the qualities demanded of a man who could fill the hearts of the people with faith and knowledge, cure them of their scepticism, provide solace to the spiritually distressed, and fire them with a burning desire for moral and spiritual uplift.

The Two Preachers of Baghdad

Allāh Almighty brought forth during this period two outstanding personages who devoted their life for the religious and spiritual revivification of the Muslims. These were ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī. Their fields of activity were different, but both of them deeply influenced the lives of Muslims in their time. It was also a blessing from Allāh that both of them had Baghdad, then the metropolis of the Islamic world, as their center, and were blessed with long life to accomplish the task to which they addressed themselves. It is also a matter of pride for the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence that both of these great luminaries belonged to it.



CHAPTER 8

ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī

OUR MASTER SHAYKH ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was born in Gilan[1] in 470/1077. He was an Arab by descent, being the tenth descendent of Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ﷺ, but hailed from Persia by migration of his ancestors. He came to Baghdad in 488/1095, at the age of eighteen. It was perhaps not mere coincidence that he arrived in Baghdad to acquire knowledge at almost the same time another renowned scholar, Ghazālī, was leaving the city in search of truth.[2] Although inclined to worship and religious exertion from an early age, he addressed himself wholeheartedly to acquire education under the most reputed teachers of the time, such as Abū 'l-Wafā' ibn ʿAqīl, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Bāqillānī, and Abū Zakariyyā al-Tabrīzī. Thereafter, he turned to mysticism and was guided in its tenets and practices by Shaykh Abū 'l-Khayr Ḥammād ibn Muslim al-Dabbās.[3] He attained completion of this path through Qāḍī Abū Saʿīd al-Makhramī[4] and was granted authorization from him in the mystic order.[5]

Popular Enthusiasm

After completing his education of religious sciences and his training in mystic disciplines, ʿAbd al-Qādir began his career as a teacher in the seminary of his own teacher Qāḍī Abū Saʿīd al-Makhramī. His sermons, which were

1 Gilan is a northwestern province of Iran, south of the Caspian Sea and north of the Elburz mountain chain. It is bounded in the east by Tabaristan (or Mazandran) and its northern border is marked by the juncture of the Kura and the Aras Rivers. Its political boundary with Russia is marked by the Astara stream. It is one of the most beautiful areas of Iran.

2 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 12:149.

3 Shaʿrānī writes that most of the mystics belonging to Baghdad were his disciples. He died in 525/1131. See Shaʿrānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 1:134.

4 His name was Mubārak ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn. As reported by Ibn Kathīr, he was a ḥadīth scholar and mystic belonging to the school of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. He died in 511/1117.

5 For details, see Ibn Rajab, *Al-Dhayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*.

delivered on the premises of the same institution, attracted such a rush of people that extensions had to be carried out in the building of the institution. It appeared as if the whole of Baghdad assembled at his congregations. At the same time, he commanded such attention and deference from the people attending his lectures that even kings would have envied it. Shaykh Muwaffaq al-Dīn ibn Qudāma, author of the *Mughnī*, records that he had not seen a man more revered for his piety and religious learning than ʿAbd al-Qādir. The ruler, together with chief and ministers, attended his sermons alongside the rank and file and used to sit in a corner without any fanfare. Scholars and jurists rubbed shoulders with students. The enthusiastic devotion of the people who attended his lectures can be well imagined by the fact that often as many as four hundred inkpots were counted being brought in to take down the notes of his sermons.

Moral Excellence

Notwithstanding the implicit reverence people had for ʿAbd al-Qādir, he remained ever modest, humble, and unpretentious. He often left his work to attend to the needs of a child, a poor person, or a slave girl. Never evading the company of the poor, he even washed their clothes or performed similar personal services for them, yet he never stood up in honor of any member of the elite. If the caliph ever paid him a visit, the historians of his time report, he deliberately went inside his quarters so that he would not have to stand up to welcome the ruler. He would then come to the receiving area after the caliph had seated himself. ʿAbd al-Qādir never paid back the courtesy call to any vizier or the ruler.[1]

Those who saw ʿAbd al-Qādir paid glowing tribute to his moral excellence, magnanimity, modesty, hospitality, generosity, and goodness of heart. One contemporary who had the opportunity to enjoy his company said that he had not seen a man more polite, large-hearted, and charitable than Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir. Despite his erudition and eminence, he respected his elders, met youngsters with good grace, was always the first to greet, and hailed the poor courteously with deference. But he never stood to welcome grandees or nobles, nor did he ever pay a visit to any minister or ruler.[2]

Another contemporary, Ḥāfiẓ Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Birzālī al-Ishbīlī, reports:

1 *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 1:127.

2 Ibid., 1:127.

> His prayers were readily answered. Extremely tenderhearted, he could weep when something to soften the heart was mentioned. More often he was to be found immersed in meditation and remembrance of Allāh. He was softhearted, courteous, cheerful, generous, compassionate, very knowledgeable and of sublime character. He was the offspring of a noble family, and was at a high level in his worship and efforts.[1]

The testimony of Muḥy al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid al-Baghdādī, the jurisconsult (*muftī*) of Iraq, runs as follows:

> Always disposed to avoid things unseemly and vulgar, he only pressed for the desirable and befitting. He would boil with indignation if the divine commandments were overstepped, but remained indifferent to wronging and ill-treatment to his own person. He would never seek revenge save for the sake of Allāh Almighty nor send back a beggar without giving him something. If he had nothing to give he would part with the clothes he had on.[2]

ʿAbd al-Qādir took pleasure in feeding the poor and spending freely to meet the needs of the destitute. Ibn al-Najjār reports that ʿAbd al-Qādir often used to say, "If I were given the treasures of the whole world, I would spend it all on feeding the poor." Sometimes he said, "It seems that I have a hole in my hands. I cannot keep anything with me. If I had a thousand dinars, I would spend every single penny by daybreak."[3] He had given instructions to his servants that as many guests as possible should be invited for dinner. During dinner he would always sit with the poor and lowly, chat with his students, or inquire after the welfare of those who were unable to be present. His behavior was so affectionate that everyone who met him gained the impression that ʿAbd al-Qādir had the highest regard for him. He overlooked the faults of others and if anyone stated something on oath, he readily accepted this statement. He never gave out the secrets of others nor said anything before others that might put someone to shame.[4]

Reassurance to the Dejected

The historians of his time agreed that Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir had quite a number of miracles. Shaykh al-Islām ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām and

1 Tādifī, *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, 9.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 10
4 Ibid., 9.

Ibn Taymiyya are of the view that ʿAbd al-Qādir was a worker of numerous miracles, but his miracle of miracles was filling the hearts of the desperate and brokenhearted with faith, hope, and enthusiasm. He breathed new life, zeal, and self-confidence into countless people through his power of speech and the spiritual power of his heart. He was truly a blessing for the world of Islam, for he renewed and revived the true content of the faith and tapped the sources of moral and spiritual strength for a religious renaissance.[1] Shaykh ʿAmr al-Kaysānī reports that there was hardly a sermon ʿAbd al-Qādir delivered after which a number of Jews and Christians did not embrace Islam, murderers and robbers did not repent of their sins, and heretics and apostates did not renounce their false beliefs.[2]

ʿAbdullāh ibn Abī'l-Ḥasan al-Jubbā'ī (d. 605/1208) relates that ʿAbd al-Qādir once told him that he wished to lead the life of a recluse in the wilderness, that he see no one, nor anyone him; but Allāh had willed that people should benefit from him. He writes, "It is a blessing granted to me that more than five thousand Jews and Christians embraced Islam at my hand and about a hundred thousand sinners and criminals repented of their misdeeds. Historians report that a large segment of Baghdad's inhabitants were inspired by him to repent and a large number of Christians, Jews, and others were honored with Islam.[3]

Teaching and Propagation Work

Gifted with divine grace and illumination, ʿAbd al-Qādir was ever conscious of the purification of spirit and rectitude of morals, yet he did not lose sight of the importance of teaching, issuing legal rulings, or *fatāwā*, and disseminating the correct doctrines of the faith. Being a follower of Imām Aḥmad and the ḥadīth scholars in theology, the doctrine of the predecessors and the Ahl al-Sunna was greatly strengthened through him, and the trend of innovation and deviation in faith and practice was diminished. Because of him, reports Ibn al-Samʿānī, the followers of the Sunna came to be held in high esteem by the masses.

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1 Ālūsī, *Jalā' al-ʿAynayn*, 130. A miracle can be expressed in Arabic by both *muʿjiza* and *karāma*, and both signify an act contrary to the usual course of nature. However, a *muʿjiza* is a term used only for the miraculous acts caused by Allāh to confound the adversaries of a prophet and to make them acknowledge the truth of prophecy. A *karāma*, on the other hand, is a wonder wrought by Allāh through a saint or pious person for the good of the people, as well as proof of his sainthood as a miracle of divine favor. These are of a lower order than the miracles of a prophet.

2 *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, 8.

3 Ibid.

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir used to teach daily classes on the topics of Qur'ānic exegesis, ḥadīth, and jurisprudence, in which he also explained the differences between various juristic schools of Islam. The classes were held in the morning and evening, and ʿAbd al-Qādir listened to the recitation of the Qur'ān after the midday prayers and thereafter dictated rulings on religious or legal questions referred to him. In formulating his answers, ʿAbd al-Qādir generally followed the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī schools of jurisprudence. His juristic opinions were highly praised by the scholars of Iraq, for they provided a striking example of the acuteness of his intellect.[1]

Once a question was referred to him about a man who had taken an oath to perform a religious observance in such a manner as nobody else in the whole world would be able to share the privilege with him, but if he failed to fulfill his undertaking it would mean an irrevocable separation between him and his wife. The scholars were confounded by the strange oath taken by the man and could not suggest a worship which could be performed by him alone in the whole world. ʿAbd al-Qādir, however, replied that the man should be allowed to circumambulate the Kaʿba alone seven times to perform the *ṭawāf*. Everyone agreed that this was the only authorized religious observance he could perform alone at a time when nobody else would be engaged in the same worship.[2]

Certitude of Knowledge

Profound knowledge of the religion and meticulous observance of the Sunna, aided by the grace of Allāh, unveiled the mysteries of the celestial world to ʿAbd al-Qādir, who reached the stage where discrimination between truth and untruth, divine intuition and demonic insinuation, becomes as though it were inborn. He had acquired the certitude of knowledge that the Sharīʿa of the Final Prophet ﷺ was perfect and unchangeable, and that any claim made contrary to the divine edict was simply a satanic suggestion. ʿAbd al-Qādir himself related an incident that he had once experienced:

> Once I saw a dazzling light that filled the entire sky. Then a human apparition appeared therein and said, "O ʿAbd al-Qādir! I am the Lord, your god. I have made lawful unto you everything." "Get away from me, Devil!" I replied. As soon as I uttered these words, the luster in the sky turned into darkness and the apparition began to dissipate into a smoke vapor. Then I heard someone

1 *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 1:126.

2 Ibid., 1:126.

> saying, "'Abd al-Qādir, I have misled seventy mystics with this trick, but Allāh saved you on account of your knowledge and piety.'" To this I responded, "No. It was simply a grace of Allāh." After 'Abd al-Qādir had related the incident, someone asked, "How did you know that it was the devil?" "He told me," replied 'Abd al-Qādir, "that he had made the prohibited things lawful for me."[1]

He used to tell his disciples that if any action transgresses the commandments of Allāh, it is surely an insinuation by the devil. In such cases, one should return to the tenets of the Sharī'a, inculcate an unflinching faith, and firmly reject the temptations of self-indulgence; for whatever is not permitted by the Sharī'a is decidedly misleading.[2]

Trust in Allāh

The unfailing and penetrating vision into the *tawḥīd*, or oneness of Allāh, had conferred upon 'Abd al-Qādir that sublime piety which produces a total resignation to Allāh's will. He explains the state of resignation in these words:

> When a man finds himself in trouble, he first endeavors to get rid of it. If he fails, he seeks the help of others, such as kings, officials, grandees, the rich, or, in the case of illness, physicians. When this effort also fails him, he turns to Allāh with invocations and praises, and not infrequently with tears and lamentations. In other words, he does not look for the assistance of others so long as he can obtain the requisite help from his own self. Similarly, he does not implore Allāh if he can get help from His creatures. And finally, when he does not get any help from that source either, he surrenders completely to Allāh Almighty. It is only at this stage that man seeks the help of Allāh with prayers and invocations, lamentations and tears, but Allāh does not accept his entreaties until he gets tired of these, too. Then, being completely dejected and brokenhearted, he is permeated by an illumination of spirit that makes him indifferent to the causes and effects. Now he has a sublimated soul, unconscious of everything save the Divine Being and aware of the true content of divine oneness. He now has a certitude of knowledge that nothing save Allāh has any power to do or undo anything; to Him belongs the power to move a thing or keep it stationary, to uplift or debase, to benefit or harm, to give life or death, to give honor or indignity, and to enrich or impoverish. The man is now like a ball in the hands of a player, or a child in the lap of a nurse, or a corpse in

1 Ibid., 1:127.

2 Ibid., 1:126.

> the hands of those who bathe it; for these are completely at the mercy of those who possess them. Likewise, the man thus loses his identity in the will of his Master. Immersed in his higher self, he has no comprehension of anything save the acts of his Lord, nor does he witness or hear or think anything else. If he seeks anything, it is the handiwork of the Supreme Creator; if he hears, it is His voice; if he comprehends, it is by the knowledge vouchsafed by Him; and if he is enlivened, it is only by His nearness. Thus, in this state of total absorption, he gets peace only through the grace and blessings of Allāh. He is loath to depend on anything save his Lord. He surrenders himself completely before the will of Allāh, acquires the knowledge of mysteries hidden from the senses through intuition and illumination of heart, and overflows with gratitude to the Lord for His countless blessings."[1]

Love of Humanity

Love for humanity in general and affection for the Umma in particular were characteristic of ʿAbd al-Qādir's sublimated soul and indicative of his close affinity to the successors of the Prophet ﷺ. In one of his sermons he delineated the object and the mental states of different types of persons visiting a market. Coming to the last category, he was perhaps describing his own feelings with these words:

> And there is the fifth man whose heart, when he enters a market, is sufficiently filled with awe and reverence for the Almighty to seek His blessings for those at the market. He becomes oblivious of everything else save his compassion for the people. He remains immersed, from the time of his entry into the market till he comes out of it, in the solemn invocation of divine blessings and in repenting for the sins of those who happen to be there, and thus he hardly gets any time to see what they are buying or selling. His heart bleeds and eyes shed tears over the ingratitude of man, while his tongue remains busy in thanking Allāh over what He has bestowed upon His bondsmen."[2]

The Times of ʿAbd al-Qādir

ʿAbd al-Qādir spent seventy-three years of his life in Baghdad. When he came to Baghdad, the Abbasid caliph Mustaẓhir bi-'Llāh Abū 'l-ʿAbbās (r. 487–512/1094–1118) was the reigning monarch, and after him four caliphs acceded to the throne one after another: Mustarshid bi-'Llāh (r. 512–529/1118–1135),

1 Jīlānī, *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, "Lecture 3," 11–13.

2 Ibid., "Lecture 72," 175.

Rāshid bi-'Llāh (r. 529–530/1135–1136), Muqtafī li-Amri'Llāh (r. 530–555/1136–1160), and Mustanjid bi-'Llāh (555–566/1160–1170).

This was one of the most troublesome times for the Abbasids, when the caliphs and Seljuq kings vied for supremacy. The former, having been shorn of their temporal power, were prevailed upon by the Seljuq kings, sometimes with their permission but often through coercion, to accept their domination. This also sometimes pulled the Islamic world into fratricidal conflicts in which Muslims shed the blood of one another.

Several such incidents took place during the reign of Caliph Mustarshid. He was a brave and wise administrator who won numerous battles, but he was finally defeated by the Seljuq king Masʿūd in 529/1135. Ibn Kathīr, giving an account of the caliph's defeat, wrote:

> The sultan [Masʿūd] gained victory and the caliph [Mustarshid] was taken prisoner. Baghdad was ransacked, plunging the city into sorrow. The people dismantled the pulpits of the mosques and gave up attending congregational prayers, and women came out lamenting for the caliph and other captives. The people in other parts of the country followed suit, and Sultan Sanjar had to ask his nephew to reinstate the caliph. Masʿūd acted on his uncle's request, but the caliph was assassinated by Bāṭinī emissaries while on his way back to Baghdad.[1]

ʿAbd al-Qādir was a witness to these heart-rending incidents. He saw the Muslims engaged in internal strife and bloodshed. The ghastliness of these feuds and forays; the cruelty, savagery, and treachery of those who engaged in them; and the miseries they inflicted upon their foes for the temporary pleasures of power, position, and riches, deeply saddened him. It is true that he had nothing to do with these struggles for power, but he was nevertheless alive to the miseries inflicted on the people and the evil effects of the unsettled conditions during his time. Through his sermons he tried, with the seriousness of purpose and ardent zeal characteristic of his style, to give a call for moral propriety and rectitude of the self. He vividly explained the temporary nature of the world and its fleeting pleasures, the need for coveting eternal bliss and preparing for the life to come, and the importance of faith and a sound mental attitude consisting of right conduct in speech, livelihood, and ethical behavior.

1 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 12:207–208.

Sermons of ʿAbd al-Qādir

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir's words had a magnetic quality still felt in them now. ʿAbd al-Qādir is at his best in *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* (The Revelations of the Unseen) and *Al-Fatḥ al-Rabbānī* (The Lordly Revelation). In describing the love and oneness of the Divine Being, he appears to be inspired by higher sources. The reader can still find the spirit of sincerity and enthusiasm running through these sermons.

Following in the footsteps of Allāh's Messenger ﷺ, his successors and the illuminated saints of the past, ʿAbd al-Qādir touched on the current problems of his day, analyzed the reasons for the miseries and maladies of the people, and provided answers to their doubts and deficiencies. Along with this, the tremendous sincerity and earnest zeal for the welfare of the people fired his speeches with a frenzy of enthusiasm and magnetic effect capable of pulling the strings of any heart.

Oneness of the Divine Being

The forces of worldliness had become so strong during ʿAbd al-Qādir's time that the entire social and economic life of the community appeared to be woven into the context of the political situation. People had developed a tendency of depending on various individuals and nobles for realization of their worldly ends and had begun to treat them as ultimate dispensers of benefits and harm. To counteract this mistaken tendency of the people, ʿAbd al-Qādir said in one of his sermons:

> This entire creation is like a man who has been imprisoned and chained by a king whose dominions are vast and countenance awesome. The prisoner has been hanged from a pine tree beneath which overflows a river wide and deep. The king is seated on an elevated chair, having arrows and bows, javelins and spears by his side. He hits the captive with whatever weapon he desires. Now, would it be prudent for anyone witnessing the scene to divert his attention from the king and expect harm or favor from the captive instead of the king? Would not such a man be deemed a fool or even mad? O Allāh, I seek your refuge from blindness after having being given eyes, from being cast off after getting near to You, from regression after being promoted to Your favor, from being misled after obtaining Your guidance, and from apostasy after having been granted faith.[1]

1 *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, "Lecture 17," 49.

In another sermon, he asked his listeners to inculcate the love of Allāh to the exclusion of everything else besides Him:

> Keep your eyes fixed on Him who is looking at you. Keep yourself before One who keeps Himself before you. Love Him who loves you. Hark unto Him who calls you. Seek help from Him who can save you, take you out of the darkness of ignorance, cleanse you of the impurity of your soul, and redeem you from the baser self and misleading temptations, despair, and timidity. Your earthly desires are like your foolish friends who keep you off the righteous path and deprive you of things pleasing and desirable. How long would you remain slaves of your desires, temptations, greed, pride—in short, this transitory world? How long would you remain forgetful of the Hereafter and of your Creator, the Fashioner of everything, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden? Everything is within His grasp, from which emanates the love within your heart, peace and solace, blessings and favors.[1]

He threw light on the same topic in another lecture:

> The whole of creation is helpless. Nothing can do good or harm to you. It is only Allāh who lets a thing be done by you, or, in other words, the will of Allāh finds expression through you or somebody else. Allāh has already destined whatever is to happen to you, be it beneficial or harmful; and this destiny cannot be changed. Those who are faithful and virtuous set an example for other creatures. There are a few among these who have so purified their heart that their inner and outer selves have become one; even if they have riches, their desires never seethe for worldly attachments. Verily, only those are courageous, valiant, and powerful who have purified their hearts and attained this stage of illumination. Unto these alone belongs the kingdom of Heaven and Earth, for they have cleansed their heart of everything but Allāh. They are like a soldier who guards the door of his heart, with the saber of Divine Oneness and the Sharīʿa in hand, to bar the entry of all creatures to a place reserved for the Creator. Since they have attuned their hearts to the ultimate source of power, the Sharīʿa beautifies them outwardly while Divine Oneness and the wisdom of Allāh's knowledge adorns them inwardly.[2]

Explaining what is meant by false objects of worship, he said:

> You put your trust in your own self, in others, in your wealth, in your rites and

1 Ibid., "Lecture 62," 157.

2 Jīlānī, *Al-Fatḥ al-Rabbānī*, "Lecture 13," 89.

customs, in your trade and business, or in your rulers; but in whatever object you place your reliance, it becomes, to say the truth, your object of worship. If you fear someone, or expect harm or favor from him or else deem him as an intercessor with Allāh, then he is the object of your worship.[1]

On another occasion, ʿAbd al-Qādir vividly described the protectiveness and pride (*ghayra*) of Allāh and His abhorrence of all associates, as also the wisdom lying behind the loss of the things adored and loved by man:

You often complain, as you would ever do, that you have to suffer the loss of whatever you set your affections on. The object of your fancy, if it is a human being, either separates or dies. If it is wealth that you care for, you either incur some loss or are stripped of it altogether. Then, I should tell you that Allāh is in love with you, and He is jealous, too! He has created you for Himself but you want to be enraptured by others! Have you not heard what Allāh has said? "He holds them dear and they Him" (Q 5:54) and also, "I created jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me" (Q 51:56). And are you not aware of what the Prophet ﷺ once said: "When Allāh loves someone, He places him in affliction, but if he puts up with it with endurance and forbearance, Allāh then sets him apart for Himself." Requested to elucidate what he meant by "setting him apart," the Prophet ﷺ replied, "Allāh deprives him of his possessions and progeny." This is so because it is natural for a man to love his offspring and possessions and thus his love, which should have been for Allāh alone, is divided between the Creator and the created, between the eternal and the finite.

Allāh is, however, extremely proud and mighty, and He therefore destroys whatever threatens to become an associate in love for Him. It is only then that the heart of the man whom He loves becomes attuned to Him. And then this man can claim to enjoy the distinction of what has been described thus by Allāh: "He holds them dear who love Him." It is the stage when the heart of the man is cleansed of all such idols and associates as offspring, riches, pleasures, and desires. It has now no yearnings, no longings left, worldly or otherwise—not even those relating to piety and miraculous powers, stations and states, nearness and remoteness; the heart becomes a bottomless vessel in which nothing can be kept. Allāh Almighty, being extremely proud and jealous, makes the heart of His beloved incapable of nourishing any other desire; He shrouds the heart of His devotee with His awe and a gasp of admiration and

1 Ibid., "Lecture 20," 137.

guards it with His glory and might so that nothing can get inside this heart; nor can possessions and riches, family and progeny, friends and relations, piety and miraculous powers do any harm to it. None of these finds a place in the heart of such a man, nor then does Allāh remain, jealous of them. Whatever is granted thereafter to this man is a gift or reward from his Lord so that he may be of help to those who are around him or visit him."[1]

Refuge of the Brokenhearted

The Muslim society in ʿAbd al-Qādir's time could be divided broadly into two classes. The first comprised the men of means who were deficient in faith and virtuous behavior. In contrast, there was another class who were poverty-stricken and down-trodden but endowed with faith and a spirit of righteousness, moral strength, and uprightness. These people feeling disconcerted and brokenhearted, sometimes viewed the rich with jealousy and mistrust and regarded themselves as deprived and discarded. ʿAbd al-Qādir held out hope and cheer to these people in one of his sermons. He said:

O empty-handed beggarly fellows! The world would appear to be at odds with you. You are barefooted, unclothed, and unfed, brokenhearted and unfortunate, evicted from every place and deprived of your longings and fancies. But do not say that Allāh has reduced you to poverty, turned the world against you, abandoned, maligned, or persecuted you, that He did not assign the portion of earthly pleasures due to you, or did not bestow honor and fame upon you. Nor is it proper for you to complain that Allāh has granted His favors to others, made them reputed and honored, although they belong to the same faith as you do and are the progeny of Adam and Eve like you.

It is really so because you are like a fertile land on which Allāh is sending down the rains of endurance and resignation, of conviction and faith, of knowledge and grace. The tree of your faith is taking root and sprouting forth its branches; its shade is closing over you, pushing out new shoots and fruits, getting higher and bigger without your providing any fertilizer to it. Allāh Almighty knows what you really need. He has therefore assigned a befitting place for you in the Hereafter. He has made you a lord in the life to come, where His bounties are countless, inconceivable, and unheard of. As Allāh has said, nobody knows what delights have been stored for your eyes in Paradise. This shall be your recompense for the faithful performance of

1 *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, "Lecture 32," 84–86.

what has been enjoined on you, and for your endurance, resignation, and submission to the will of Allāh.

As for those who have been well-afforded in this world, they have been placed in easy circumstances; for they are like a barren land, rocky and sandy, which neither stores nor absorbs the rains, and it is difficult to plant the tree of faith in it. It has therefore to be provided with fertilizers so that the weak saplings of their faith may get nourishment and push out the shoots of righteous action. So if wealth, honor, and fame are taken away from them, the tree of their faith shall waste away and its leaves and fruits shall wither although Allāh intends to make it strong. Therefore, my poor brethren, you ought to know that the faith of the wealthy does not have deeper roots, it lacks that strength which has been endowed to you, and it needs riches and earthly prizes for its nourishment. If these gifts were to be taken away from them, their faith would give way to blasphemy, and they would join the ranks of infidels, apostates, and hypocrites, unless, of course, Allāh bestows on them spiritual light and illumination, endurance, and resignation to strengthen their faith."[1]

Worldly Pleasures

ʿAbd al-Qādir did not preach asceticism, nor did he exhort people to give up their worldly possessions. What he emphasized in his sermons was that one should use them to the extent he needs them but never allow himself to become a slave of his desires and temptations, nor should he hold the earthly gifts dear to his heart. Explaining the purport of the ḥadīth which says, "Verily, the world has been created for you, and you have been created for the Hereafter," he said:

> Do not try to obtain your share of worldly gifts in a way that you have to keep standing before it like a beggar. You ought to be like a sovereign who keeps himself seated while gifts are presented before him. This world acclaims those who stand and wait at the door of Allāh Almighty, but it demeans those who wait upon the world. Therefore, get your share of worldly benefits without demeaning yourself or compromising your dignity. This is what Allāh expects of you.[2]

In another sermon he said:

> It is perfectly lawful to lay hands on the world and its gifts, to possess it or

1 Ibid., "Lecture 25," 65–67.

2 *Al-Fatḥ al-Rabbānī*, "Lecture 21," 145.

> even to accumulate it for a commendable purpose, but it is forbidden to set your heart upon it. You may allow it to stand at the door of your heart but it is prohibited to allow it to get inside, for it shall not bring any honor to you.[1]

Critique of the Kings

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir did not sermonize and admonish the populace alone. He fearlessly performed the duty made incumbent by the Sharīʿa of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong; and whenever he considered it necessary, he publicly denounced the actions and policies of kings, nobles, and officials. He bitterly criticized the faults of the great ones without the slightest consideration of their power or position. Ibn Kathīr, a later historian, put it like this:

> He admonished all—caliphs, viziers, kings, jurists, elites, and laity—to adopt the righteous course and forsake things forbidden. He openly and unsparingly criticized everyone to his face in his discourses. He used to denounce the authorities sternly if they appointed a tyrant to public office. He never cared for anyone if he saw the commands of Allāh being overstepped.[2]

The author of *Qalāʾid al-Jawāhir* writes that when Caliph Muqtafī li-Amri 'Llāh appointed Abū 'l-Wafāʾ Yaḥyā, a man notorious for his cruelty, as chief justice, ʿAbd al-Qādir admonished the caliph in these words:

> You have appointed a man notorious as the "most tyrannical" to rule over the Muslims. What would your answer be tomorrow on the Day of Judgment before the Lord of the Worlds, the Most Merciful?[3]

The author further says that when the caliph came to know of the admonition of ʿAbd al-Qādir, he burst into tears and immediately dismissed Abū 'l-Wafāʾ Yaḥyā from the office.

ʿAbd al-Qādir also vigorously condemned the worldliness of those scholars, jurists, and saints who were prepared to accept office from or to join the entourage of a ruler. He held this class responsible for the waywardness of the kings and ruling chiefs. In one of his addresses he rebuked these elements thus:

> Ha! You are the one who have misused your knowledge and wisdom. What have you to do with your predecessors? You are enemies of Allāh and His Apostle; you are no more than robbers, tyrants, and hypocrites! How long

1 Ibid., "Lecture 51," 363.

2 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 12:252; *Qalāʾid al-Jawāhir*, 8.

3 *Qalāʾid al-Jawāhir*, 8.

> will you persist in your pious fraud? How long will you continue to don this shroud of affected piety for the sake of your kings and rulers? How long will you remain a slave of power and position, passions and desires? Verily, you and most of your kings are tyrants and traitors to Allāh and His bondsmen. O Allāh, our Lord, either degrade these transgressors and humiliate them or make them repent of their sins. Either mortify the tyrants and efface them from Your earth or let them mend their ways.[1]

On another occasion he addressed a religious scholar with these words:

> Are you not ashamed that your avarice has forced you to serve these tyrants and acquire the unlawful? How long shall you hold on to your mean pursuits? The kingdom of the rulers to whom you are playing second fiddle shall shortly be no more, and then you shall be presented before Allāh Almighty, who is Eternal, Almighty.[2]

Concern for Moral Rectitude

Extremely solicitous of eradicating the moral laxity and viciousness produced by ever-increasing opulence, luxury, and indolence in the metropolis of Islam, ʿAbd al-Qādir sometimes came out with the severest criticism of the then society, giving expression to his heartfelt misery over the sinful ways of the people. This was the impassioned appeal ʿAbd al-Qādir made in one of his sermons:

> The edifice of faith built by the Apostle of Allāh is being demolished, brick by brick, and now it is about to fall to pieces. Come, O mankind, to rebuild what has been dismantled and renovate what has been laid waste. Until this task is completed, we have to work jointly as a team. Come to my aid, O Sun, O Moon, O Stars.[3]

Similarly, in another sermon. he said:

> Islam is shedding tears. Its wail of woe is on account of the blasphemous hypocrites and innovators who are practicing a pious fraud by attributing things that do not belong to Islam. Look at your predecessors. They lived like you but enjoined the right and prohibited the wrong. But you have forgotten them altogether so soon after their death! Do you not know that even a dog

1 *Al-Fatḥ al-Rabbānī*, "Lecture 51," 363.
2 Ibid., "Lecture 52," 371.
3 Ibid., 649.

> is faithful to its master? He guards his fields and the cattle, is pleased to see his master although he does not get more than a few crumbs in the evening. You are favored with the bounties of Allāh, but, quite the other way, you are neither thankful to Him nor do you dutifully perform the task assigned to you. Instead, what you do is to break His commands and transgress the limits of the Sharīʿa.[1]

Reform and Renovation

ʿAbd al-Qādir's impressive sermons were a source of inspiration to innumerable people in Baghdad. These sermons enabled thousands to offer earnest repentance of their sins. But in order to build up a movement aiming at a widespread and permanent reform of the social, moral, and spiritual life of the people, it was necessary to find a way whereby more durable relations could be fostered between mentor and disciple and, at the same time, arrangements could also be made for the religious education and training of disciples. As they were, the discourses did not provide a permanent link between the speaker and the audience. People came to these meetings, listened to the sermons, and left to return or not as they wished. Many of them persisted on the path they had been treading without paying any heed to the call of the reformer to purify their souls and to rectify their moral behavior.

Religious seminaries and educational institutions likewise did not provide an answer to the problem because of the vast population of Muslims and the mundane preoccupations of the people. The problem of making arrangements for a continued and concerted effort for the education and training of the people in religious tenets and practices—and infusing a breath of new life in the vast numbers spread over far-off lands—defied a solution in the absence of a truly Islamic state. The foremost business of the caliphate was, in the words of Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, to guide the people in moral rectitude rather than to collect revenues for the conduct of administration. The then Muslim states, however, were not only indifferent to this fundamental objective, but were also extremely resistant to any movement or criticism on this score that might pose a threat to their political supremacy. These governments were thus suspicious of all efforts toward the resurgence of the Islamic spirit and, erroneously taking them as movements designed to build up political leadership, lost no time in crushing them.

In these circumstances there was no way left to revivify the religious

1 Ibid., 661.

spirit and fill the people with an enthusiasm, zeal, and self-confidence for reintroducing the precepts of religion in their daily life. The only remaining alternative was to call upon the people to take an oath of allegiance for the purpose. Following in the footsteps of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, it had become necessary that a guide of spiritual and moral excellence should obtain a pledge, or *bayʿa*, from the people willing to offer sincere repentance and to lead a virtuous life in the future in accordance with the directions of their mentor. If placing oneself under the instruction of an inspired guide meant that one was fairly started on his journey to the end of purification of spirit and moral rectitude, the pledge of allegiance enjoined a much more onerous responsibility on the mentor. The guide or spiritual teacher had to lead the wandering soul of the disciple who took the pledge, stage by stage: cleansing oneself of spiritual impurities; renouncing the love of worldly temptations and desires, wealth, and celebrity; infusing a spirit of moral uprightness and correct ethical behavior; following the teachings contained in the Qur'ān and the Sunna; and illumination of the soul. This was, in truth, what the pledge meant and the means by which the inspired souls tried to infuse into their disciples—through preaching and personal example, loving care and unalloyed sincerity—an inner vitality of spirit and strength of moral integrity.

As experience shows, the reformers and renewers of faith succeeded in reviving the true faith and tapping new sources of popular strength in their own times through this tried and unerring method, which merely copied the procedure and technique of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. Countless individuals have not only been provided the opportunity to adopt a virtuous life through this method, but have even been led to attain the stage of "the reality of faith" (*ḥaqīqat al-īmān*) and of "beautification and excellence" (*iḥsān*) by inspired guides and mentors, of whom the exemplar of the time was the Reviver of the Faith, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. The history of peoples subscribing to the faith of Islam will bear witness that no guide with an illuminated soul was more successful than ʿAbd al-Qādir in bringing about a revival and resurgence of the true Islamic spirit. At the same time, the method he followed is still the easiest and most effective way, in a time of chaos, of filling people with faith and enthusiasm aimed at reforming their lives in accordance with the tenets of Islam.

A few divines and mystics had employed the method of *bayʿa* before ʿAbd al-Qādir, as historians report, but none achieved such success as his. With his profound knowledge, intellectual gifts, charming and loving personality, and spiritual excellence, he renovated the system of *bayʿa* and founded a

new mystic order now known as the Qādirīs. ʿAbd al-Qādir elaborated and systematized mystic practices, broadened their scope, and developed them to make them more harmonious with the tenets of the Sharīʿa. Within his own lifetime, countless people were guided through this path of self-discipline, devotion to Allāh, and virtuous living, and after him his disciples propagated the Qādirī order in almost every Muslim country. Branches of the order were founded in Yemen, India, Indonesia, and in several countries of Africa, where it helped innumerable people to come back to the path of loyalty and obedience to Allāh and His Apostle.[1] ʿAbd al-Qādir and his disciples were also successful in converting a considerable number of non-Muslims to Islam. May Allāh be pleased with him and make him pleased, and grant him an excellent reward on behalf of Islam.

ʿAbd al-Qādir's Influence

The moral and spiritual excellence of ʿAbd al-Qādir, his unflinching devotion to Allāh, the efficacy of his sermons, the inspiring and rejuvenating influence he exercised over the people in his own time, and the upright character and moral rectitude of those who had an opportunity to be instructed by him, mark him as one of the most eminent men of Allāh born to Islam. He was not only a worker of many miracles, as the chroniclers of his time report, but his miracle of miracles lay in his inspiring and impressive teachings, which caused thousands to turn away from the lust of power and wealth and to inculcate the true spirit of faith through self-correction and purification of the soul. In short, his was a striking example of the innate power of Islam

1 Among the disciples of ʿAbd al-Qādir who devoted their life to the cause of preaching and inviting people through precept and practice to spiritual and moral purification, the most notable was Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), the spiritual successor and nephew of Shaykh Abū 'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī. He was the founder of another mystical order known as the Suhrawardīs. He also wrote a very popular work on mysticism entitled *ʿAwārif al-Maʿārif* (Gifts of Gnostic Sciences). Ibn Khallikān writes that during his old age he was the greatest mystic of Baghdad and there was no one as pious and popular (*Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 3:119). Another writer, Ibn al-Najjār, has left records about his immense popularity and preaching (Yāfiʿī, *Mirʾāt al-Jinān*, 4:81). Ibn Khallikān writes that mystics from far-off places visited him for guidance and spiritual light, adding that his sermons were highly effective (*Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 3:119–120). His *ʿAwārif al-Maʿārif* has pride of place among mystic works. One of its distinguishing features is that unlike the writings of the earlier mystics, it upholds the tenets of the orthodox school and cleanses the Sharīʿa of all innovations. Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān says, "There is no book as good as the *ʿAwārif* in Sunnī mysticism" (*Tiqṣār Juyūd al-Aḥrār*, 63). Suhrawardī was also fortunate in having some very notable personages among his disciples. One of these, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Zakariyyā al-Multānī, was a well-known and eminent saint of his time in India. The outpouring that came from him in India and the guidance that was disseminated by him is enough evidence of his high position and raised status.

to produce a true spirit of religion, love of Allāh, and moral righteousness in an age of crass materialism.

His Death

After a lengthy period of benefitting people the world over with his inner and exterior qualities, and after reviving an interest in spirituality and focus on Allāh among the Muslim communities, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir died at the age of ninety in 561/1166. An account of his death has been preserved by his son, Sharaf al-Dīn ʿĪsā, who wrote:

> During his final illness, his son ʿAbd al-Wahhāb requested him to give him some advice he could follow after his death. The shaykh replied: "Inculcate a deep consciousness of the sublimity and grandeur of Allāh. Fear not anyone nor cherish a desire for benefit from anyone save Allāh. Entrust all of your needs to Him and then have confidence in Him. Whatever you need, place it before Allāh with a conviction in the prospect of its fulfillment. Keep yourself constantly occupied with the oneness of God, on which there is consensus; for when the heart is filled with awe, love, and respect for Him, nothing can escape it or get out of it." Then he asked his sons to clear out, saying: "You find me here with yourself but I am really with others. Make room for the angels who are here beside me. You ought to be courteous and pay homage to them. I find the blessings from Allāh descending here for which you should leave ample space." For a day and a night he from time to time saluted some invisible beings. He would say, "May the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon you. May Allāh pardon you and me and accept our repentance. Come, in the name of Allāh, and do not go back." Once he said: "Woe be unto you. I care not a whit for anything, neither for the Angel of Death nor any other angel. O Angel of Death, my Lord has bestowed blessings on me far in excess of you."
>
> On the night the shaykh died, he gave a loud cry. He lifted and stretched out his hand several times and addressed his sons, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Shaykh Mūsā, saying, "May Allāh have peace and blessings on you. Turn to the True One and get in line." Then he said, "'I am just coming to you. Be kind to me." He remained unconscious for a while after that. On regaining consciousness he exclaimed, "There is as much difference between you and me as between the heavens and the earth. Don't think of me like anybody else." When ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, one of his sons, asked about his illness, he replied, "Don't ask me anything. I am immersed in gnosis of Allāh." In reply to another question asked by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, he said, "Nobody knows my illness, nor can

anyone diagnose it, neither the jinn, nor men, nor angels. The command of Allāh never supersedes His knowledge; the order changes but not His knowledge. Allāh may override His command by another one, but never what is contained in His knowledge. He obliterates or preserves whatever He desires. He is the final authority above whom there is none. Unlike a human being, who has to render an account for his actions, Allāh is omnipotent. Now I know the secrets of His attributes: they are what they are."

One of his sons, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, asked him if he had any pain. The shaykh replied to him: "I have pain in my entire body except my heart, which is attuned to Allāh." Then, in his last moments, he said, "I seek the help of Allāh Almighty save whom there is no other god. Glorified is He, the Most High. He is ever-living, for death seizes Him not. Praise be unto Him for He is the Exalted, the Mighty. He exercises His power through the death of his creation. I bear witness that there is no god save Allāh and that Muḥammad is the apostle of Allāh." His son Mūsā relates that he tried to say *taʿazzaza* (exalted and dominant is He), but he was not able to utter it correctly. He tried again and again till he pronounced the word correctly with a loud and strong voice. Then he said, "Allāh! Allāh! Allāh!" His voice failed thereafter, the tongue having been fixed up in the palate. Soul departed body. May Allāh be pleased with him and make him pleased.[1]

ʿAbd al-Qādir left quite a large number of pious and saintly disciples who continued to disseminate his message and fight the ever-increasing worldliness and such of its vices as opulence and luxury, fame and power.

1 *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, 189–192.

CHAPTER 9

Abū 'l-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī

ʿALLĀMA ABŪ 'L-FARAJ ʿAbd al-Raḥman Ibn al-Jawzī presents another striking example of a preacher, reformer, and renewer of the faith. He was the most respected and profound scholar of his time, a famous orator and a prolific writer of voluminous books on Qur'ānic exegesis, ḥadīth, history, and literary criticism.

Early Life

Born in 508/1114 in Baghdad, Ibn al-Jawzī was thirty-eight years younger than ʿAbd al-Qādir master of the day, Ibn Nāṣir, in his mosque. He committed the Qur'ān to memory and learned its formal recitation, and he studied ḥadīth and calligraphy. Describing his childhood days to his son, Ibn al-Jawzī says:

> I recall clearly that I was admitted to primary school at six. Boys much older than me were my classmates. I do not recall if I had ever spent my time playing or laughing with other boys. Instead of watching jugglers perform who frequently held their shows in the field in front of the mosque where I studied, I would attend lectures on ḥadīth. Whatever ḥadīths or biographical accounts of the Prophet ﷺ were related in the lectures, I memorized, and then I would write them down on reaching home. Other boys spent their time playing along the banks of the river, but I would invariably sit down with a book in my hand in a corner and read it from cover to cover.
>
> I was always so eager to attend class on time that I was often out of breath upon reaching the school before the lectures began. It happened not infrequently that I had nothing to eat the whole day, but I am thankful to Allāh that I have never had occasion to be grateful to anybody in that regard.[1]

1 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Laftat al-Kabid fī Naṣīḥat al-Walad*, 81–82.

Passion for Ḥadīth

Ibn al-Jawzī had an intense enthusiasm for acquiring knowledge and propagating the ḥadīth of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. His works on the subject were so numerous that, as the historians of his time report, Ibn al-Jawzī made a will stating that the water for the ritual washing of his dead body should be heated by burning the shavings and nibs of the reed pens he used to write down ḥadīth. It is further related that these shavings were found to be more than sufficient for the purpose.[1]

Ibn al-Jawzī was a voracious reader from an early age. In his day, Baghdad had well-stocked libraries where he used to spend most of his time. He read whatever book he could lay his hands on. In his own memoir, *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*, he writes:

> I may state here my own cast of mind. I am never tired of reading books and my joy knows no bounds whenever I find a new book. It would appear to be an exaggeration if I said that I had gone through twenty thousand books during my student days. I came to know of the courage, large-heartedness, erudition, tenacious memory, piety, and eagerness for prayer cherished by the scholars of the past, which I could not have learned without reading those books. My study of books in those days also revealed to me the shallow knowledge of scholars in our times and the dull spirits of students today.[2]

Prolific Writings of Ibn al-Jawzī

Ibn al-Jawzī turned to writing at a young age. He began writing four folios a day and continued the practice throughout his life. Ibn Taymiyya relates that when he took stock of Ibn al-Jawzī's books, they were found to number more than a thousand. Ibn al-Jawzī had such a profound knowledge of the science of ḥadīth that he claimed to be able to tell the authenticity or inauthenticity of any narration with reference to the character of those through whom it had been transmitted or with reference to the manner in which it had been related. He was also without peer as an author and orator.

Piety and Inclination to Worship

Ibn al-Jawzī was as much celebrated for his moral uprightness, devotion, and piety as for his literary accomplishments. His grandson, Abū 'l-Muẓaffar, relates that Ibn al-Jawzī completed a recitation of the Qur'ān every week.

1 *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 3:321.

2 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*, 3:607–608.

He never spent his time in frivolity or frolicking during his childhood and never ate anything unless he was sure that it had been obtained through lawful means. Ibn al-Najjār records that in religious devotion and observance of prayers Ibn al-Jawzī presented an awe-inspiring picture of saintliness. Another historian, Ibn al-Fārisī, reports that Ibn al-Jawzī kept vigils at night and was never forgetful of the remembrance of Allāh. The works of Ibn al-Jawzī provide a striking example of his fervent devotion and heartfelt love of Allāh. In *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* he writes:

> From early childhood I was inclined toward devotion in religious contemplation and worship. I zealously observed obligatory as well as supererogatory prayers and preferred seclusion. Spending my days thus, I felt peace and enlightenment. I severely regretted time spent otherwise, for I had an ardent desire to utilize every moment of my life in diligent consciousness of the Omnipresent Lord. In those days, I felt my heart attuned to Allāh, while my prayers and supplications were a source of indescribable pleasure to me. My lectures and discourses, which appear to have been quite effective in those days, attracted a few high officials and chiefs who wanted to come closer to me by paying homage and putting themselves at my service. As it was, I too felt inclined toward them, but in their company I lost the sense of peace and sanctifying grace I had enjoyed previously in my supplications. Thereafter, other functionaries of the government started gaining my favor, with the result that the precautions I used to take earlier in avoiding everything unlawful and doubtful gave way to a sense of complacency. It was not yet too deplorable, but gradually my specious reasoning made the doubtful appear perfectly lawful, and I realized I had lost the sublimity and purity of my heart. It seemed instead as if a profaneness had taken its place, which gave rise to restlessness and disquietude in me. I observed that my sermons also bore a mark of my anxiety, as ever greater numbers of people repented for their sins and reform themselves while my own guilt weighed heavily on my consciousness. This, obviously, made me still more disturbed, but there seemed to be no way out. I visited the tombs of the pious and earnestly beseeched Allāh to show me the right path. Ultimately, Allāh helped me and I again felt inclined to spend more of my time in prayer and solitude. Now I came to know what was wrong with me and I thanked my Lord, the Most Compassionate and Merciful, for His kindness.[1]

1 Ibid., 1:121–122.

Profile and Character

He is reported to have been a well-built man with handsome features and an imposing countenance. Favored with easy circumstances, "he possessed a refined taste in dress and food and was charming and graceful," reports Muwaffaq ʿAbd al-Laṭīf. Another scholar, Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb Ibn al-Dīnī, relates that Ibn al-Jawzī was soft-spoken, handsome, and of medium height, known for his clemency and generosity. Extremely careful with his health, he liked what may be called the "good things of temperate quality."

In *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* and *Talbīs Iblīs*, Ibn al-Jawzī recounts his numerous practical experiences and advises against extreme ascetic practices introduced by Persian mystics.

Lofty Aspiration and Encyclopedic Knowledge

The most outstanding feature of Ibn al-Jawzī's character was his versatility. He towered over his contemporaries in his ardent desire to be well-versed in almost every branch of learning. He describes this aspect of his nature in some detail in *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*:

> The greatest trial for mankind lies in the loftiness of his ambition: the higher his ambition, the loftier his aspiration for advancement or success. However, one is sometimes unable to achieve (one's ambition) owing to unfavorable circumstances or a lack of means, and this creates dissatisfaction. But Allāh has made me so ambitious that I always have a yearning for something higher, yet have never felt that Allāh Most High might not have made me too ambitious. It is true that life can be fully enjoyed only by a carefree, imprudent, and listless person, but nobody endowed with brains would ever prefer the retrogression of his intellect simply for the sake of getting more fun out of worldly pleasures. I know of many people who are boastful of their lofty ambitions, but I have found their aspirations actually limited to only one field of their activity, in which they are ardently desirous of achieving success. These people are completely indifferent to their deficiency in other fields. A poet by the name of Sharīf al-Raḍī once said in a couplet, "Ill health is never without a cause, but in my case it is because of too high an aspiration." However, on going through his biographical accounts I found that he had no ambition other than achieving power and position.
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> It is related that Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī could not sleep well during his youth. When asked why, he replied, "How can I sleep? Brilliant and ambitious though I am, I have been condemned to lead a life of poverty and obscurity."

"Then what would satisfy you?" asked someone. He replied, "I will be satisfied only if I achieve greatness and power." "Then try for it," he was advised. "This would not be possible without putting my life at stake," he replied. He was asked again, "But why don't you do so?" He replied, "My intellect asks me not to run into danger." "What would you do then?" the questioner demanded. "I would not accept the advice of my intellect," replied Abū Muslim, "and would give myself up to my folly. I will play a desperate game at the bidding of my ambition and seek the help of intellect only where imprudence fails me. I have no other course left, as poverty and obscurity are interdependent." On giving further thought to this self-deluded yet ambitious man, I came to the conclusion that he had not given thought to one of the most important factors, and that was the question of the life to come. He was madly seeking political power, for which he had to be cruel and unsparing of innocent human life. He got just a fraction of worldly power and glory, the things he aspired to, for a short period of only eight years. Thereafter, he fell an easy victim to the treachery of [the Abbasid caliph] Saffāḥ, and then his intellect did not come to his aid. It was the same with [the poet] Mutanabbī, who was as ambitious as he was enamored of worldly success.

My ambition, however, is quite different from theirs. I aspire for a profound knowledge embracing the entire field of learning, which I know I cannot attain. I want to achieve a thorough and complete knowledge of every branch of learning, which is obviously not possible in the short span of human life. I do not consider anyone perfect in the knowledge of a science so long as he lacks perfection in another branch; for example, if a ḥadīth scholar is not a master of jurisprudence too, I consider his knowledge to be incomplete.

The imperfection of knowledge, I think, can be attributed to lack of ambition alone. Not only that, to me the ultimate objective of knowledge is an ability to act on it. Thus, what I want is to be able to combine with my knowledge the diligence of Bishr al-Ḥāfī and the piety of Maʿrūf al-Karkhī. But it is hardly possible to accomplish this along with the preoccupations of studying and teaching and other mundane affairs. That is not all. I aspire to oblige others but do not want to live under their obligation. My preoccupation with my studies is an impediment in the way of my earnings, but I detest being indebted to anyone or accepting gifts from others. I ardently desire to have children, as well as to be an author of merit and distinction, so that these may honor my memory, but both of these pursuits stand in the way of solitude and contemplation. I also like to enjoy lawful pleasures but do not possess the means for achieving them, and if I devote myself to obtaining them, I would

lose contentment and peace of mind. So too with other matters. For example, I like the delicacies and refinements which my good taste desires. All these mean to aspire for mutually opposing ends. What have they to do with such lofty ideals who aspire simply for worldly success, wealth, power, and position? I too want worldly success, but in a manner that does not cause me to impair my faith or to expose my learning or virtuous action to any risk or injury.

Who can appreciate the restlessness of my ambition? On the one hand, I relish night vigils and taking precaution and God-fearingness, but on the other hand, I have an inclination toward the cultivation of knowledge, teaching, and writing and the acquisition of appropriate foods for the body. None of this is possible without occupying the heart. Interaction with people and educating them is necessary, but on the other hand, when the sweetness of supplication in seclusion and intimate discourse with the Divine is diminished, this creates much grief and sorrow. Spiritual decline is unbearable for me, but making ends meet for my dependents stands in the way of my spiritual progress. I have endured these strains all through my life and submitted to the will of Allāh, for it seems the path to success and perfection for me lies in struggles and afflictions. For the loftiest ideal is to seek the pleasure of Allāh. I guard myself against every defilement and take care that not a single moment of my life is spent in any vain effort. Glory be to Allāh if I succeed in my endeavors. I won't mind if I fail, however, for the Messenger ﷺ has said that the intention of the faithful is better than his action.[1]

Popular Enthusiasm

The sermons Ibn al-Jawzī delivered were attended by caliphs, kings, and chiefs of the state, in addition to the common people of Baghdad. It is reported that his lectures were regularly attended by ten to fifteen thousand people and sometimes as many as a hundred thousand. An eloquent speaker, his sermons breathed an almost tragic urgency behind his message, which touched the heart of his audience. His soul-stirring calls so carried away his listeners that many of them burst into tears, broke down into hysterical screams, or even tore off their shirts. Countless people offered earnest repentance for their sins. It is estimated that Ibn al-Jawzī aided the conversion of twenty thousand Christians and Jews to Islam and inspired over one hundred thousand people to take solemn pledges to lead a virtuous life after listening to his sermons.[2]

In his sermons, Ibn al-Jawzī always condemned innovations and unlaw-

1 Ibid., 2:334–337.

2 Ibid., 1:21.

ful additions to the faith, asking the people to follow the path enjoined by the scripture and the ḥadīth. Because of Ibn al-Jawzī's profound knowledge and eloquence as well as his popularity, the heretical sects and factions never dared to contradict him, with the result that the orthodox school of Islam gained a dominating influence. The caliphs and nobles of the time became followers of the Ḥanbalī school, which was distinguished by its strict adherence to ḥadīth and scripture.

Critical Literary Endeavors

Ibn al-Jawzī produced several highly distinguished scholarly works which had a profound effect on later academic endeavors. His writings helped subsequent generations keep to the right path as enjoined by the Sharīʿa.

Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt (The Book of Forged Narrations) is Ibn al-Jawzī's chief work on ḥadīth. In this book, he discusses many spurious or weak narrations that were then commonly relied upon by heretics for spreading beliefs contrary to the authorized teachings of the established school. It is true that Ibn al-Jawzī is at times too harsh in his judgments in this book, adopting an extreme position on certain issues. Nevertheless, he performs an invaluable service by exposing fallacies of heretics and innovators.

Talbīs Iblīs (The Deceit of Iblīs) is a critical study of Muslim society. In this book, he evaluates the different classes and sections of the Muslim society of his time, highlighting their weaknesses, misconceptions, and aberrations and delineating the causes that gave birth to different vices which marred their faith, action, and behavior. Ibn al-Jawzī details the habits, customs, faults, and self-deceits to which scholars, jurists, preachers, writers, rulers, and the pious often fall prey. This book is an outstanding example of the panoramic character of Ibn al-Jawzī's writings. He shows an awareness of the mental, emotional, and social attitudes of the different classes of Muslim society, along with the beliefs and doctrines of heretical sects and the subtle ways in which they mislead others.

Critique of Scholars and Administrators

Ibn al-Jawzī's criticisms in *Talbīs Iblīs* are at places too severe, as is his verdict, which is symbolic of his extreme views. Nonetheless, the book contains a treasure of useful information since it deals extensively with the vices found among different segments of the populace. One must generally agree with Ibn al-Jawzī's analysis, which also gives an idea of the liveliness and incisiveness of his intellectual grasp.

Criticizing the scholars of his time, some of whom engaged in unnecessary hairsplitting of legal issues, he writes in *Talbīs Iblīs*:

> One of the greatest weaknesses of these scholar-jurists is that they have occupied themselves with vain discussions, but they do not pay heed to the scripture, ḥadīth, and the biographies of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, which would have had a softening effect on their souls. It hardly needs emphasizing that the discussions on trifling issues like the types of impurities and the methods of purification will not make one tender-hearted or receptive of the awe of Allāh. What man needs is the remembrance of Allāh and discourses on the subject, so that these may create a longing for success in the life to come. There is no denying that ethical issues are not beyond the scope of the Sharīʿa, but these alone are not sufficient for achieving the ultimate objective. How can people be expected to follow the example of the pious souls of bygone days, whose faith they profess to own, unless they endeavor to attain the state of ecstasy and proximity to Allāh attained by them? One should not lose sight that man is indolent by nature and, if left to himself, would be inclined to follow the beaten path of his day. On the other hand, if he tries to cultivate the knowledge of beliefs and behavior of the pious and elevated mentors of former times, he will naturally try to take after their ways. A teacher of the past said that he would prefer a ḥadīth that would make him soft-hearted to a hundred legal decisions of Qāḍī Shurayḥ.[1]

In his critique of the preachers in the same book, Ibn al-Jawzī observes:

> Most of these preachers are accustomed to using grandiloquent and heavily embellished language that often means nothing. The greater share of their discourses is devoted to the accounts of the Prophet Mūsā ﷺ, Mount Sinai, Yūsuf ﷺ and Zulaykhā, and the like, but they have hardly anything to say about the obligatory acts enjoined by the religion or how to avoid sins. How can their sermons prevail upon an adulterer to seek repentance, or convince a woman to be faithful and maintain good relations with her husband? These discourses are completely devoid of the ethical or religious teachings of the Sharīʿa. This is also one of the reasons for these sermons being so popular; for the truth is always distasteful, while falsehood is pleasing.[2]

Further, continuing with the same subject, he observes:

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1 *Talbīs Iblīs*, 119–120.

2 Ibid., 125.

> It often happens that the preacher is sincere and honest but wants to win over and dominate the hearts of his audience, to gain their admiration. A sure symptom of this vice is that if another preacher tries to help him or begins to deliver lectures to his audience, he resents it, whereas a sincere person would welcome a helping hand in the endeavor.[1]

Ibn al-Jawzī also criticizes the scholars for their lack of sincerity:

> If the students of any scholar leave their teacher to sit at the feet of another teacher more learned and reputed than him, he feels a burning in his heart that does not befit a sincere scholar. Sincere scholars and teachers are like physicians who treat people simply to secure Allāh's pleasure, and contentedly give their blessing to any other physician who is able to cure their patient.[2]

In connection with the vices developed by kings, rulers, and administrators, Ibn al-Jawzī writes:

> These people prefer to pattern their behavior according to their own wishes rather than do what the Sharī'a enjoins. They would cut off a hand or execute a person even though it might not be lawful to do so. They labor under the misconception that what they do is essential as a matter of political expediency. This means, in other words, that the Sharī'a is incomplete and they are now making up for that deficiency.
>
> This is, in reality, a great deception created by Satan; for the Sharī'a contains divine guidance for the conduct of our temporal affairs as well, and it is unthinkable that the guidance vouchsafed by Allāh should be deficient. Allāh Almighty declares, "We have not left anything incomplete in the Scripture," and, "There is none to amend Our order." Thus, one who wants to overlay the Sharī'a with his own ideas, on pretext of political expediency, in reality claims that the Sharī'a is imperfect and incomplete. This is clear blasphemy.[3]

Ibn al-Jawzī points out another weakness of rulers and administrators in these words:

> Besides their persistence in their wrongful ways, they also ardently desire to pay a visit to some pious and godly figure for the purpose of seeking his blessing in their favor. The devil has led them to believe that the solemn invocation of divine blessings by a godly person will lighten the burden of their sins. This

1 Ibid., 125.
2 Ibid., 131.
3 Ibid., 132.

is not so. Once, a trader whose transport filled with trade goods had been withheld by a tax collector went to the venerated master Mālik ibn Dīnār and requested his help. Mālik ibn Dīnār went to the collector, who treated him respectfully, saying that he did not have to come himself and could have sent a message through someone, and released the goods of the tradesman. Thereafter the official asked Mālik to pray for him, but Mālik replied, "Ask this purse in which you keep your ill-gotten money to pray for you. How can I invoke blessings for you when countless people curse you? Do you think," added Mālik, "that Allāh will accept the entreaties of a single individual in preference to the prayers of a thousand others?"[1]

Elsewhere he writes:

The rich and the affluent have a great regard for such misguided mystics, who approve of the hearing of songs and playing of musical instruments. They lavish these mystics with their riches, but would not part with a single shell for the sake of scholars and teachers. In fact, the scholars are like physicians on whose advice a man spends his money grudgingly only when he falls ill. On the other hand, to spend on the misguided mystics and the musicians and singers accompanying them is like spending on a songstress. Yet they are like courtiers and flatterers who cling to every wealthy person.[2]

Likewise, they are devoted to the ascetics and other persons of assumed piety, and prefer them to the scholars of religion. They would readily submit to a charlatan clothed as a dervish. If he practices a pious fraud on them they are easily led astray and begin to sneer at the scholars for not being ascetics. They wonder how scholars can be compared to these dervishes, the latter forsaking the word while the former hanker after it, eating fine foods and marrying. However, to hold the ascetics in higher esteem than the scholars is plain ignorance and an insult to the Sharīʿa. These misguided souls should really be thankful to Allāh that they were not present during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, for they would have turned apostate if they had seen him taking wives, eating, wearing clothes, and enjoying honey and sweets.[3]

In his critique of the masses, Ibn al-Jawzī writes:

Satan has misled the masses to believe that attending religious sermons and raising a wail of woe are highly meritorious acts and the sole purpose of

1 Ibid., 134.
2 Ibid., 373.
3 Ibid., 388–389.

delivering such sermons. This is perhaps because the people have been told about the merits of listening to these discourses, but they do not know that their aim is reformation of their own morals and rectification of their behavior. Nor do they appear to be aware that whatever they listen to in these lectures shall be cited as evidence against them on Judgment Day. I personally know a number of people who have been attending such lectures for a number of years. They get excited on hearing these sermons and burst into tears, but they persist in accepting interest, cheating others in their trade, remaining unmindful of religious duties, and disobeying their parents. Satan led them to believe that their presence at these sermons, their lamentations and fits of crying, will atone for their neglected duties and the sins of omission and commission. There are also others who think that accompanying pious and Godly men or paying visits to them shall be enough to expiate their sins.[1]

In regard to the rich and affluent, Ibn al-Jawzī has the following to say:

Many of these people spend lavishly on the construction of mosques or bridges, but their object is really to become famous and win people over by such acts of piety. Another objective they have in view is to be remembered after their death, and for that purpose they get their names inscribed on the foundation stones of these edifices. Had they undertaken the construction of these works for the pleasure of Allāh, they would have been content with the knowledge that Allāh is aware of what they do. If these persons were to be asked to simply have a wall constructed, without having their names inscribed on it, they would never agree to it.

Likewise, these people donate candlesticks to the mosques during the month of Ramaḍān, although these same mosques remain without light during the rest of the year. They cannot, obviously, evoke the admiration of others by providing oil for daily lighting, which they hope to attain by the donation of a single candlestick during the month of Ramaḍān.[2]

Ṣayd al-Khāṭir (Captured Thoughts)

Not strictly an autobiographical work, this book contains Ibn al-Jawzī's reminiscences and his ideas, feelings, and personal experiences. In describing the incidents he has encountered, Ibn al-Jawzī frankly admits his mistakes and weaknesses. He often addresses his own self to criticize its longings and aspirations, gives an account of his mental and emotional states, describes his

1 Ibid., 393–394.

2 Ibid., 395.

social experiences with the help of common, everyday happenings, and relates the wisdom derived from his trials and tribulations, the rough and tumble of life, and his dealings with women, friends, and servants. An outstanding feature of this book is its immaculate sincerity and simplicity. The book is also noted for the easy eloquence and lucidity of its style, which marks the first attempt made by an Arab writer in this direction, since the prevailing style at the time was to use heavily embellished language in literary works.

Ibn al-Jawzī possessed the gift of extracting wisdom from insignificant occurrences that many of us come across and pass over without pause. Here is an example from *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*:

> I saw two laborers who were carrying a heavy beam. Both were humming a song. When one recited a verse, the other listened to it attentively and then repeated it or came out with another verse in reply to the first. I thought that if they did not do so, they would have a greater consciousness of their exertion. By singing the laborers made their work easier. On further reflection I found that by engaging themselves in singing, the minds of the laborers get a little respite. They busy themselves in another [mental] work for a short duration and thus refresh themselves. This diversion also decreases the consciousness of their burden by drawing their attention away from the exertion of their work. My attention was diverted from [this scene] to the burden of responsibilities and obligations enjoined by the Sharīʿa. I thought that perhaps the consciousness of these obligations constitutes the heaviest burden on the self of man, while the greatest effort lies in controlling and checking the propensities and impulses for which the self has a liking. Thus, I arrived at the conclusion that one should cover the path of endurance by giving [oneself] necessary respite, and by allowing the consciousness to refresh itself by yielding to lawful pleasures. A poet rightly said, "When the caravan gets tired of traveling for the whole night, tell the people that the dawn is at hand and that they will get their needed respite during the day."
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> A similar story is told of Bishr al-Ḥāfī, who was going somewhere along with a friend. The friend got thirsty and asked Bishr to wait a bit so that he could get water from a well. Bishr advised him to wait until they reached the next well, and then to the next one. After they had covered a considerable distance, Bishr told his friend that the life in this earthly world is also a journey which can be completed in that manner. In truth, whoever is aware of the fact alluded to by Bishr will console his self, cheer it up when in distress, and assure it of lowering the burden so that it may bear the weight of its responsibilities

with endurance. A certain teacher of the past addressed his self thus: "O my self, if I check you from your fancies and attractions, it is only on account of my affection for you." Another pious master, Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī, once said, "I used to lead my wailing self flooded with tears toward Allāh, then it gradually became familiar with the way and began to forge ahead cheerfully." It should thus be remembered that it is absolutely necessary to console and enliven the self so that it may bear its burden patiently.[1]

At another place, he writes:

I have seen that when hounds pass by wild dogs, the latter bark at them and try to chase them. The wild dogs are envious of the hounds because of their collars and clothing, but the hounds pay no attention to them, as if they do not belong to the same species. The wild dogs are fat and clumsy and are not trustworthy. The hounds, on the other hand, are lean, well-proportioned, and quick. They are also well trained and trustworthy. It is out of fear or on account of gratitude to their master that they bring him back their quarry. I have drawn two conclusions from this comparison. First, the frame and appearance of a man has a bearing on his morals. If the former has fine countenance, the latter will also be of fine demeanor. Second, nobody is envious of one whom he does not consider his equal. Likewise, a man who has been favored by Allāh with faith and wisdom bears no ill will against those who lack these qualities, even though such a person might be moved by jealousy toward him. In fact, the faithful does not consider the faithless worthy of his attention, for their spheres of hope and aspiration are quite different: one harbors a feeling of hostility at another's good in this world, but the other aspires to success in the world to come. There is a world of difference between the two.[2]

Dialogue with the Self

Ibn al-Jawzī sometimes applies the method of tracing an incident to its source so as to discover the general principles underlying that phenomenon. Once he prayed to Allāh Most High together with another pious person. Their prayer was answered by Allāh and this made him wonder whose prayer had found favor with Allāh. Here Ibn al-Jawzī analyzes the incident through self-dialogue.

Once I was confronted with a difficulty for which I had to invoke divine

1 *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*, 1:146–147.

2 Ibid., 3:639–640.

blessings and supplicate. Accordingly, I prayed to Allāh along with another righteous person. I felt that my prayer was about to be answered by Allāh, but I felt that it was not on account of my own entreaties but because of the prayer of that pious soul. I said to myself, "I am aware of my own sins and weaknesses which should seemingly not allow my prayers to be answered, but who knows if Allāh did not in fact accede to my own entreaties?" I felt that, although the revered man of Allāh who prayed for me should be free of those vices from which I knew I suffered, there was a difference between him and myself. I had a sense of regret and self-reproach for my sins, while he was cheerful and enlivened. And it is not infrequent that brokenhearted confession is more beneficial on occasions like this.

There is, however, another matter in which both of us stood on equal footing. Neither of us solicited the favor of Allāh on the basis of our own moral excellence. Now, if in these circumstances I had owned my mistakes and humbly prayed to Allāh, "Take pity on me, O Lord, for I am empty-handed," there is every likelihood that my supplication would have been granted. Also, it is just possible that the other person might have had an eye on his actions, which would have caused hindrance in the acceptance of his prayer.

Therefore, O self of mine, you should not make it insufferable for an already brokenhearted man like me. I am aware of my guilt, and I do also confess my sins. At the same time, I am aware of what I ask, and have a faith in the beneficence of my Lord, to whom I submit my entreaties. Allāh may bless that devoted soul if he lacks this quality, but so far as I am concerned the confession of my guilt is my most valuable possession.[1]

At another place he again portrays his inner struggle in these words:

I was once undecided about a matter which was improper and unbecoming under the Sharīʿa, but that my mind had brought forth certain arguments in its favor, making it appear lawful to me. In truth, however, it was nothing but specious reasoning because, as I later found out, it was manifestly abominable. However, I addressed myself to Allāh and implored Him to ward off this state of indecision.

I also began reciting from the Qur'ān to set my mind at rest. As I had to teach the commentary of Sūra Yūsuf, I began my recitation from there. I was so engrossed with the problem I had in mind that I did not pay much attention to what I was reading, but I was taken aback when I recited the

1 Ibid., 1:157–158.

verse, "He said: I seek refuge in Allāh! Lo! He is my lord, who has treated me honorably" (12:23). I felt as if this verse had been revealed for me. I said to myself: "Did I follow it?" Yusuf was free; he was wrongfully made a slave and sold to Potiphar. Yusuf felt so grateful to Potiphar that he called him his lord, although neither was Yusuf a slave, nor Potiphar a master. The chief reason for Yusuf's gratitude to Potiphar was that the latter treated him honorably. "Now thing of your own self," I told myself. "You are the true slave of a master who has been a benefactor to you ever since your birth. Nobody knows how many times he has overlooked your mistakes. Do you remember how He provided your needs? It was by His grace that you acquired knowledge and earned your living. He guarded you from every danger and guided you to adopt the right course. He saved you from the hostility of your enemies. He bestowed on you a pleasing appearance as well as intellectual gifts. He enabled you to master the sciences in a short duration, although others were unable to acquire them over a much longer period. He also favored you with eloquence, intellect and memory, caused the people to show you kindness and reverence, and made it easy for you to procure your livelihood without having to live under obligation to others. It is not possible, in truth, to thank Him for the innumerable favors He has bestowed on you: the good-looking countenance, well proportioned limbs, worthy demeanor, refined taste, intellectual fortitude, discrimination to adopt the right path and to avoid lewdness, the opportunity to acquire knowledge of the ḥadīth and to act on them"—"Verily, if you would count the bounty of Allāh you cannot enumerate it" (Q 14:34).

"How many of your enemies laid snares for you, but Allāh saved you? How much they wanted to discredit you, but He exalted you. How many favors were granted to you, but denied to others. How many people left this world brokenhearted, but you were crowned with success. Do you not see that you are in good health, have sound intellect and a wholesome faith? Your knowledge is abounding, your aspirations are fulfilled, and if you are ever thwarted in any desire, Allāh makes you patient and forbearing till you know that it was really preferable that your desire did not meet with success. It would be impossible to recount all the favors of Allāh bestowed on you, since the unknown bounties invested by Allāh on humanity are far in excess of those that he can comprehend. Then, how did you consider it lawful to do something which was considered unclean by Allāh Almighty? I seek refuge in Allāh! Lo! He is my lord, who has treated me honorably: Lo! wrongdoers never prosper."[1]

1 Ibid., 2:283–285.

Ibn al-Jawzī narrates another personal experience of the same nature:

> Once I acted on a legal opinion which was upheld by certain schools of jurisprudence but rejected by others. However, I felt an uneasiness in my heart, which caused me spiritual contraction. I felt as if I was rejected from the divine court and anger was showered down upon me. With a deepening sense of loss and sullenness, I felt as if my own self were asking me, "You didn't act against the advice of the jurists. Why then is there this feeling of deprivation?" I replied, "O my insinuating self, I have two answers to your question. First, you turned aside from the teachings of your own juristic school. If you had been asked to pronounce a legal opinion on this question, you would not have advised it thus." "I wouldn't have acted on it," interjected the self, "if I had not considered it lawful." I replied, "No, you would not even advise others to act likewise."
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> "And the second reason," I added, "is that you should be happy over the gloom you have experienced, for had you not been already favored with illumination you would not have had this feeling of loss." "But I dislike the gloom coming over me," replied the self. "Then you should make up your mind to give up the disputed act," I said. You think that it has been made lawful through consensus of opinion. Still, you should decide to renounce it simply out of fear of Allāh." The self was then saved from spiritual decline and gloominess after it had acted so.[1]

Importance of Studying the Lives of the Pious Predecessors

Ibn al-Jawzī was primarily a ḥadīth master and a jurist, but he always emphasized the importance of studying the biographical accounts of pious and saintly masters from the past for the purpose of purifying the soul and fostering zeal for religion. In *Talbīs Iblīs* and *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* he advises scholars, jurists, and ḥadīth masters to pursue this branch of learning. Speaking of his own experience in this regard, he writes in *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*:

> I feel that the study of juristic sciences and ḥadīth is not sufficient to instill the tenderness in the heart that enables it to attract divine grace. The only way to acquire this faculty is to study the inspiring biographies of the masters who were pure of heart. The knowledge pertaining to lawful and unlawful matters does not produce warmth and tenderness of heart. This is brought about by reading the inspiring incidents narrated in the ḥadīth and the biographical

1 Ibid., 2:304.

accounts of the pious predecessors. Those teachers of past times had realized the true content of faith and lived up to it, instead of simply acquiring knowledge of it. What I am recommending to you is my personal experience. I have seen that ḥadīth scholars and their students generally devote their entire attention to the chain of narrators and the criteria for the acceptance or rejection of the narrations. Similarly, jurists are extremely fond of the science of dialectics for scoring a victory over their opponents. How can these soften one's heart? Formerly, the people used to visit godly men in order to pattern their behavior after the example set by these pious souls rather than acquiring knowledge from them. This is indeed the true aim of knowledge. Therefore, let it be understood very clearly that it is absolutely necessary for you to include the study of the lives of the pious and revered souls in your study of law and tradition.[1]

Writing the Biographies of the Righteous

Ibn al-Jawzī accordingly wrote the biographies of a number of luminaries, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 165/782), Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/841), Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/814).[2] In addition to these biographies, he also wrote a compendium of respected scholars, writers, and ascetics, in four volumes under the title *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*. This book is really a revised edition and rearrangement of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī's *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*. In revising the book he has kept in view the principles of historical criticism and deleted the spurious accounts related by Abū Nuʿaym.

Importance of Studying History

Ibn al-Jawzī held the view that along with their study of religious sciences like the law and ḥadīth, students should also read history because lack of knowledge in this branch of learning had led certain scholars to commit unpardonable mistakes. He therefore advised every student to have at least enough knowledge of history to prevent him from committing any grievous mistakes. He writes in *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*:

A jurist must be conversant with all the related sciences. A jurist has to have the knowledge of other sciences like history, ḥadīth, lexicology, and so forth, on which he very often has to rely. I heard a jurist saying that Shaykh Shiblī

1 Ibid., 2:302–303.

2 Ibn al-Jawzī has mentioned these books in *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* (1:137, 154, 175; 2:363; 3:562, 604, 606).

and Qāḍī Sharīk once got together for a meeting. I wondered at the ignorance of the jurist who did not know that the two were not contemporaries. Another scholar once said in a lecture that since Caliph ʿAlī ﷺ had bathed the dead body of Fāṭima ﷺ, their marriage did not terminate even after the death of the latter. May Allāh help this man, I thought, for he does not know that Caliph ʿAlī had married the niece of Fāṭima, Umāma bint Zaynab, after Fāṭima ﷺ passed away. How would that have been possible if their marriage had continued after the death of Fatima?

I have seen similar grievous mistakes committed by Ghazālī in the *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. I was surprised to see how he could mix up incidents which happened at quite different times. I have compiled all such errors in *Iḥyāʾ* in one of my books. . . . Another scholar, Shaykh Abū 'l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī, has mentioned a curious story in his book entitled *Al-Shāmil* on the subject of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). He writes that certain Bāṭinīs have related that Ḥallāj, Abū Saʿīd al-Jannābī al-Qarmaṭī and Ibn al-Muqannaʿ had conspired to overthrow the government by creating dissatisfaction among the masses. Each one of them undertook to raise an insurrection in a certain country, and in accordance with that agreement Jannābī went to Ahsāʾ, Ibn al-Muqannaʿ to Turkistan, and Ḥallāj to Baghdad. Ḥallāj's two companions, however, were of the opinion that he would surely lose his life because it was not possible to dupe the people of Baghdad. If the narrator of this story only knew that Ḥallāj was not a contemporary of Ibn al-Muqannaʿ, he would not have given credence to this story. Manṣūr had ordered the execution of Ibn al-Muqannaʿ in 144/761, while Abū Saʿīd al-Jannābī al-Qarmaṭī came to prominence in 286/899, and Ḥallāj was killed in 309/291. Thus, Qarmaṭī and Ḥallāj were almost contemporaneous, but Ibn al-Muqannaʿ came much earlier. There is thus no way the three met and conspired together.

This should make it amply clear that every scholar should have a grounding in the sciences related to his own field of study. It is discreditable for a ḥadīth master to be unable to give a legal opinion in any matter simply because he has been engaged in the study of ḥadīth and has had no time to pay attention to other branches of religious learning. Similarly, it does not behoove a jurist to be unable to explain the meanings of any ḥadīth. I implore Allāh to endow us with an ambition and resolve that will not allow us to put up with the least indolence.[1]

1 Ibid., 3:604–606.

Historical Writings

Ibn al-Jawzī did not only criticize the scholars for not being well versed in history. He also wrote a comprehensive history of Islamic peoples from the inception of Islam till 574/1178 in ten volumes. In this work, entitled *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa 'l-Umam* (An Arrangement of the History of Nations), Ibn al-Jawzī first gives the year and then narrates the important incidents and events of that year along with the preeminent figures who died in it, followed by an account of their achievements. This work thus combines chronicle with scientific history, interwoven with a harmonious account of the lives of notable personalities.[1]

Another historical work of smaller size by Ibn al-Jawzī is *Talqīḥ Fuhūm Ahl al-Athar fi ʿUyūn al-Tārīkh wa 'l-Siyar* (Fertilizing the Perceptions of the Ḥadīth Scholars Concerning the Springs of History and Biographies). This is a compilation of historical information that has also been published.[2]

Oratory of Ibn al-Jawzī

The historians of his time agree that Ibn al-Jawzī was a gifted orator who could draw large crowds. In his book *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* he mentioned his internal struggle, which once almost prevailed upon him to pay absolutely no attention to the style and choice of words in his speeches, as this could be construed as a rhetorical show. However, he gave up the idea because, on further reflection, he concluded that eloquence was a gift from Allāh, a distinction and not a defect, which ought to be employed for the propagation of faith. Similarly, Ibn al-Jawzī entertained a desire, more than once, to give up preaching and withdraw himself into a life of complete seclusion and meditation. However, he won over his self to follow the right path by arguing the issue with it. He ultimately decided that this was a suggestion hinted by Satan, who did not like to see thousands of persons carried away by his eloquence toward the path of moral and spiritual reformation. The prophets of Allāh (upon them be Allāh's mercy) were primarily preachers and they also associated with the people. Man's self, being indolent and abhorring exertion, wants to turn its back upon the world. It is also tempted by love of fame, honor, and popularity, which can easily be gained through winning over the hearts of the people by retiring from the world. Thus, Ibn al-Jawzī reasoned with his self to counter

1 The last five volumes of this book were published by Dā'irat al-Maʿārif, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India.

2 Published by Sayyid Muḥammad Yūsuf of Tonk, India.

the whisperings of Satan, who wanted him to abandon his mission of preaching and inviting people toward the path of divine guidance. Ibn al-Jawzī thus continued to press his intellectual gifts for more than half a century to the task of serving his people and the revival of the faith.

Death

Ibn al-Jawzī died on a Friday night in 597/1201. The entire population of Baghdad suspended its work to attend his funeral prayer, which was held in the grand mosque of Manṣūr. It was a memorable day in the history of the city. Innumerable people were found weeping for the departed teacher. It was Ramaḍān, and historians report that quite a few inhabitants of Baghdad spent their nights for the rest of the month at his grave, offering prayers and reciting the Qur'ān for the peace of his soul.

CHAPTER 10

Nūr al-Dīn Zangī & Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī

The Crusaders

The Umma of Islam devoted its attention to educational and intellectual pursuits on the one hand, while Christendom consolidated its might to wipe out the entire Islamic world on the other. Europe had nourished an intense hatred for Islam ever since the Arabs had taken arms against the eastern possessions of the Byzantine Empire. All the holy places of Christendom, including the birthplace of ʿĪsā ﷺ, were under Muslim rule. This alone was sufficient cause for Europe to yearn for vengeance against Islam, but the existence of powerful Islamic states and their continued inroads into the Christian countries prevented them from developing the heart to hope for Muslim territories. However, the decline of the Seljuq Empire and the insecure conditions in Asia Minor and Syria toward the end of the fifth/eleventh century were in many respects to Europe's advantage. At the same time, Christian lands received a wandering preacher, Peter the Hermit, who could move thousands of poor Christians from one corner of Europe to another through his eloquence and fiery zeal. In addition, numerous other social and economic factors combined to cover the religious venture of the Crusaders with a veneer of romance, albeit tainted with avarice, ambition, and lust.[1]

The first eastward march of the Crusaders toward Syria commenced in 490/1197. Within two years the great cities of Edessa (Ruhā),[2] and Antioch and several fortresses were captured, and by 492/1099 the Christians had taken possession of Jerusalem itself. Within a few years the greater part of Palestine

1 For detailed account of these reasons, see "Crusades," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

2 Present-day Urfa in southeastern Turkey.

and the coast of Syria, Tortosa, Acre, Tripoli[1] and Sidon fell into the hands of the Crusaders. "The Crusaders penetrated like a wedge between the old wood and the new," wrote Stanley Lane-Poole, "and for a while seemed to cleave the trunk of the Mohammedan empire into splinters."[2] The capture of Jerusalem threw the fanatical horde of Crusaders into a frenzy, and gave rise to their wildest passions; such savagery even their own writers were ashamed to confess, yet unable to deny. Here is a graphic account of the massacre of Muslims after the fall of Jerusalem:

> So terrible, it is said, was the carnage which followed that the horses of the Crusaders who rode up to the mosque of Omar were knee-deep in the stream of blood. Infants were seized by their feet and dashed against the walls or whirled over the battlements, while the Jews were all burnt alive in the synagogue.
>
> On the next day the horrors of that which had preceded it were deliberately repeated on a larger scale. Tancred had given a guarantee of safety to 300 captives. In spite of his indignant protest these were all brought out and killed; and a massacre followed in which the bodies of men, women and children were hacked and hewn until their fragments lay tossed together in heaps. The work of slaughter ended, the streets of the city were washed by Saracen prisoners.[3]

The fall of Jerusalem marks the beginning of the decline of Muslim power and the increasing strength of the Christian West, which succeeded in establishing four Latin kingdoms in Jerusalem, Edessa, Antioch, and Tripoli in the territory bordering the eastern end of the Mediterranean from the Euphrates to Egypt, placing the entire Muslim world in danger of annihilation. The ambition of the Warriors of the Cross ran so high that Reginald (Raynald) of Châtillon once expressed the desire to cross over to Arabia with the clear design of sacking Makka and Madīna, taking the body of the blessed Prophet ﷺ out of his grave.[4] Never since the rise of the Apostates following the death of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ had such a grave danger threatened Islam. With the existence of Islam at stake for the second time in history, its adherents had to take the field for a decisive battle with the Latin West.

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1 Tripoli (or Ṭarābulus), a city in the northwest of present-day Lebanon. This was known as the Tripoli of the East while its namesake in Libya was known as the Tripoli of the West.

2 Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin*, 25.

3 "Crusades," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 6:627.

4 *Saladin*, 177.

Dissension of the Muslim East marked the opening decades of the sixth/twelfth century. After the death of Malikshāh, the last great Seljuq ruler, civil war broke out among his successors and the empire split into many separate principalities. There was no one ruler with the capacity to unify the forces of Islam in order to stand on the defensive against the increasing pressure from the West. Stanley Lane-Poole rightly said:

> It was a time of uncertainty and hesitation—of amazed attendance upon the dying struggles of a mighty empire; an interregnum of chaos until the new forces should have gathered their strength; in short, it was the precise moment when a successful invasion from Europe was possible.[1]

Atābek ʿImād al-Dīn Zangī

At this critical moment, when the despair of the Muslims was at its height, a star rose in the eastern horizon. As had happened earlier, Islam received a champion for its cause from an unexpected quarter, who appeared on the scene to save the situation. Lane-Poole writes:

> It was but necessary to preach the *Jihad*—the Holy War—and to show them a commander whose courage and military genius all must respect, and the Turkoman chiefs and vassals would at once become a Church Militant with whom the Crusaders would have very seriously to reckon. The leader was found in Imad-ed-din Zengy.[2]

ʿImād al-Dīn Zangī had been indulged and pandered by the Seljuqs. He was the tutor of the princes of the Seljuq Sultan Maḥmūd II, hence known by the title Atābek (Tutor of the Princes). The Sultan conferred on him the government of Mosul. After consolidating his power in Syria and Iraq, ʿImād al-Dīn advanced against Edessa, one of the strongest fortresses held by the Crusaders and the one serving as the base for their aggressive inroads into the neighboring territories held by the Muslims. ʿImād al-Dīn captured Edessa on 6 Jumādā'l-Ukhrā 539 (4 December 1144). It was the "conquest of conquests," according to Arab historians, for Edessa was regarded by the Christians as the "stoutest prop of the Latin Kingdom." The valley of the Euphrates was thus finally saved from the marauding excursions of the Crusaders. Shortly after achieving this brilliant victory, ʿImād al-Dīn was assassinated by a slave on 5 Rabīʿ al-Thānī 541 (14 September 1146). Thus perished one of the

1 Ibid., 25.

2 Ibid., 34.

greatest heroes of Islam, who had opened the way for a counterattack against the Crusaders. However, the task, left incomplete by the great Atābek, was advanced by his illustrious son, Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Nūr al-Dīn Zangī.

Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Nūr al-Dīn Zangī

The responsibility of championing Islam now fell to Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd Zangī,[1] then the sultan of Aleppo. The constant aim he held firm throughout his life was the expulsion of the Crusaders from Syria and Palestine. For him, *jihād* with the Crusaders was the greatest act of piety, crowned with divine blessings. In 559/1164 Nūr al-Dīn Zangī captured Ḥārim,[2] a stronghold of the Crusaders in the north, after defeating the united armies of the Franks and Greeks. It is related that ten thousand Crusaders were slain in this battle and innumerable Crusaders were taken prisoner along with most of their chieftains, such as Bohemond Prince of Antioch, Raymond III Count of Tripoli, Joscelin III Count of Edessa, and the Greek general Duke of Calamar. Soon afterward the fortress of Banias (Caesarea Philippi), at the foot of Mount Hermon,[3] fell before the arms of Nūr al-Dīn, and on the other side was Egypt with the Muslims now encircling the Crusaders from two sides.[4] Lane-Poole describes the significance of this political change:

> The possession of the Nile by Nur-ed-din's general [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn] placed the Kingdom of Jerusalem as it were in a cleft stick, squeezed on both sides by armies controlled by the same power. The harbours of Damietta and Alexandria[5] gave the Moslems the command of a fleet, and enabled them to cut off the communications of the Crusaders with Europe, stop the annual pilgrim ships and seize their supplies.[6]

Nūr al-Dīn had thus outmaneuvered the Crusaders in Palestine, but his greatest ambition was to drive them out of Jerusalem. However, even though he had laid its foundations, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn would complete the task; Nūr al-Dīn died in 596/1174, aged fifty-six, due to the quinsy.[7] The news of his death, writes Lane-Poole, "fell like a thunderbolt among the Saracens."

1 Known to the West as Noradinus.

2 Harem, in Arabic Ḥārim, a city in Syria situated on the border with modern Turkey, 55 km west of Aleppo on route to Antioch.

3 This is in the Golan Heights, Syria.

4 *Saladin*, 84; *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 11:124.

5 Both cities are in Egypt.

6 *Saladin*, 103.

7 A complication of tonsillitis.

Character of Nūr al-Dīn

Muslim historians remember Nūr al-Dīn as a chivalrous, just, and generous ruler; most tender-hearted, pious, and high-minded, and a fearless warrior ready to risk himself at the front of every battle. True to his name "Maḥmūd," he was acclaimed as one of the best of the kings; as the historians describe him, he was more capable and enlightened than his predecessors.

Ibn al-Jawzī, who was a contemporary of Nūr al-Dīn, writes of him in his *Muntaẓam*:

> Nūr al-Dīn marched upon the enemy at the frontiers of his domain and succeeded in regaining more than fifty towns from the enemies. He led a life better than most of the kings and sultans. Peace and tranquility reigned in his kingdom. There is, in fact, a lot to be said in his praise. He always considered himself a subordinate of the caliph at Baghdad. Before he died he abolished all oppressive and illegal imposts within his territories. He was extremely simple in his habits and loved the pious and scholars.[1]

Another historian, Ibn Khallikān, who is known for his objective assessment of characters and events, says:

> He was a just and pious king, always eager to follow the observances prescribed by the Sharīʿa, and a generous patron of scholars in whom he took great interest. He was distinguished for his keen desire to take part in the *jihād*; he spent his income on the pious foundations and welfare of the poor; and had set up educational institutions in all the principal cities of the Levant. It is difficult to enumerate all of his qualities or the monuments by way of public works left by him."[2]

Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī, the reputed historian and author of *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil* (The Complete History), writes:

> I have studied the careers of the rulers of the past, but excepting the first four rightly-guided caliphs and ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, there has been no ruler so excellent in character and in pursuit of justice [as Nūr al-Dīn].[3]

Ibn al-Athīr's testimony carries a special weight because he was in his fourteenth year when Nūr al-Dīn died. He writes about the character and disposition of Nūr al-Dīn:

1 *Al-Muntaẓam*. 10:248–249.
2 *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 4:272.
3 *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 9:163.

He met his personal expenses from the property he had acquired out of the proceeds of his own share in the booty taken in war. He had set apart three shops situated in Homs which accrued an annual rent of twenty dinars for meeting his household expenses. Once, when his wife complained to him that the income from the shops was insufficient, he dryly replied, "I have nothing more to give you. Whatever else you see, I hold in sacred trust for the Muslims and I am no more than their trustee. I would not like to be consigned to Hellfire for your sake by spending anything on ourselves out of the public funds."

He used to devote a greater part of his time after the nightfall in prayers and had a regimen of remembrance that was set for him. He was a scholar of the Ḥanafī school but was not blindly zealous, and had studied ḥadīths which he transmitted for the sake of reward and granted authorization to others.

He was distinguished by his remarkable love for justice, which could be seen, for example, in the fact that he had abolished all customs, dues, and tithes throughout his vast kingdom comprising Egypt, Syria, North Iraq and Mosul. He was always eager to observe, in exact details, the disciplines and injunctions of the Sharīʿa. Once, he was summoned to appear before a court. He sent the word to the judge that no preferential treatment should be accorded to him when he appeared before the court as a defendant. Although he won the case against the plaintiff, he gave up his claim in favor of his opponent, saying, "I had already decided to do so, but I thought that perhaps my vanity wanted me to avoid attending the court of law. So I decided to appear before the court and now give up what has now been decided in my favor." He had set up a special tribunal known as the Court of Justice (Dār al-ʿAdl), where he, along with a judge, personally heard cases against arbitrariness on the part of high officials, princes, etc.

In battle his valor earned everyone's admiration. He always took two bows and quivers to the battlefield. Once, somebody said to him, "For Allāh's sake, don't expose yourself as well as Islam to danger!" "Who is Maḥmūd," retorted Nūr al-Dīn, "that you speak thus of him? Who defended the country and Islam before me? Verily, there is no defender save Allāh."

He held scholars in high esteem and always stood up to receive them. He took keen interest in their affairs and patronized them with generous gifts; but despite his humility and simplicity, he had such a commanding personality that people were seized with awe in his presence. The fact is that it is not possible to relate all his qualities in the limited compass of this book.[1]

1 Ibid., 11:163–164.

Unflinching Faith

Nūr al-Dīn had set his heart on the expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land. He had unflinching faith in this mission and firm conviction that he would ultimately succeed.

Nūr al-Dīn suffered a defeat at Ḥiṣn al-Akrād[1] in 558/1163 when he was taken unawares by the Christians.[2] Soon thereafter he made camp near Homs, a few miles from the enemy encampment. Some of his well-wishers advised Nūr al-Dīn that it was not wise to remain so near to the enemy after suffering defeat. Nūr al-Dīn told them to keep quiet: "I wouldn't care about the enemy if I had only a thousand horses with me. By Allāh, I will not go under a roof until I have taken revenge on the enemy."

Even after this defeat, Nūr al-Dīn continued with his generous grants to the learned, the poor, and the pious. When it was suggested to him that the amount earmarked for such charitable purposes be diverted to strengthening the forces at that critical juncture, Nūr al-Dīn replied angrily:

> But I hope for the support of Allāh Almighty only on account of their pleasure and prayers. The ḥadīth says that Allāh causes sustenance and assistance to come down to earth through the poor and the oppressed. How can I desist from helping those who fight for me when I am fast asleep? And lo! They never miss their targets! Yet you want me to help those who fight only when they see me in their midst on the battlefield, and they often succeed or fail in their endeavors. The poor have a right to derive benefit from public revenues, and so how can I ask them to forgo what is due to them?[3]

Nūr al-Dīn made preparations to avenge his defeat. He distributed large sums to his followers, sent letters to all the chiefs and governors requesting fresh levies, and at the same time asking the pious to pray for his success. His efforts created a new upsurge throughout his vast dominion to fight against the Crusaders in defense of Islam. Nūr al-Dīn met the united armies of the Franks and the Greeks in one of the harshest battles, which took place under the walls of Ḥārim, where he achieved a splendid victory over his foes, gaining control over Ḥārim and a few other fortresses.[4]

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1 Ḥiṣn al-Akrād ("Fortress of the Kurds"), a castle in Syria known in Europe by the name of "Crac des Chevaliers." The castle crowns a rounded and almost isolated summit, mount Khalīl, the last southerly inclination of the Jabal Anṣāriyya, some 60 km northwest of Homs.

2 *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 11:119.

3 Ibid., 11:119.

4 Ibid., 11:122–123.

The unflinching faith of Nūr al-Dīn may be imagined considering an incident reported by historians. While he was laying siege to Banias, his brother, Nuṣrat al-Dīn lost an eye. Nūr al-Dīn, on meeting his brother, said, "If you only knew the divine reward for losing your eye, you would ardently desire to lose the other one too."[1]

SULTAN ṢALĀḤ AL-DĪN AL-AYYŪBĪ

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī[2] was, in fact, a continuing miracle of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and a manifest sign of the truthfulness and authenticity of his message.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was brought up like other Kurd youths of moderate means, studying the conventional sciences and the art of warfare. Before Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn captured Egypt and confronted the Crusaders, nobody could have predicted that this young man would one day emerge as the conqueror of Jerusalem and a great defender of the religion, and that he would achieve such historical eminence as to be looked upon by posterity as a brilliant example for his fervor and valor in battle or for his sterling virtues, which could rightly be envied by the most pious and pure souls. Describing the youth of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Lane-Poole says:

> As the favoured governor's son, he naturally enjoyed a privileged position, but far from exhibiting any symptoms of future greatness, he was evidently a shining example of that tranquil virtue which shuns "the last infirmity of the noble minds."[3]

But Allāh had destined for him to become the most renowned leader of his time; and when Allāh wills a thing, He provides the means therefor. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's master, Nūr al-Dīn, ordered him to proceed to Egypt. Qāḍī Bahā'

1 Ibid., 11:123.

2 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb ibn Shādī al-Ayyūbī was not a descendant of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, the famous companion of the Messenger ﷺ. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn called himself Ayyūbī after the name of his father, Ayyūb, who was a Kurd hailing from Dawīn in eastern Azerbaijan. They were from the Rawwādiyya branch of the extensive Hadhdhāniyya tribe. It appears that his grandfather Shādī had migrated to Baghdad with his two sons Ayyūb Najm al-Dīn and Shērkōh Asad al-Dīn, and thereafter settled in Tikrit where he died. Ayyūb and Shērkōh entered into state service under Mujāhid al-Dīn Bahrōz, the police chief under the Seljuq Sultan Mas'ūd ibn Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Malikshāh. Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb was later employed by 'Imād al-Dīn Zangī, who made him the custodian of the Baalbek castle. Even today, Kurds exist in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran (Muḥammad Farīd Abū Jadīd, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī wa 'Aṣruhū*, 45–47).

3 *Saladin*, 72.

al-Dīn ibn Shaddād, a trusted counselor to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, writes that the latter had confessed to him that he had gone to Egypt against his own will and that it was as it says in the Qur'ān: "But it may happen that you hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that you love a thing which is bad for you" (Q 2:216).[1]

Transformation of His Life

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, however, completely changed after assuming power in Egypt. He understood that Allāh required a certain type of work from him and that could not be accompanied by leisurely pleasure and comfort.

Ibn Shaddād recorded that "no sooner had he assumed rulership of Egypt than the world and its pleasures lost all significance in his eyes. With a heartfelt sense of gratitude for the favor bestowed upon him by Allāh, he repented from drinking, renounced the temptations of pleasure, and took to a life of sweat and toil, which increased with the passage of time."[2] Lane-Poole has the same story to tell. He writes:

> On his side, Saladin began to order his life more rigorously. Devout as he had always shown himself, he became even more strict and austere. He put aside the thought of pleasure and the love of ease, adopted a Spartan rule, and set it as an example to his troops. He devoted all his energies henceforth to one great object—to found a Moslem empire strong enough to drive the infidels out of the land. "When God gave me the land of Egypt," said he, "I was sure that He meant Palestine for me also." It may well be that natural selfish ambition quickened his zeal, but the result was the same: thenceforward his career was one long championship of Islam. He had vowed himself to the Holy War.[3]

Enthusiasm for Jihād

The constant aim of his efforts was to fight in the way of Allāh. Describing the enthusiasm of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn for *jihād*, Ibn Shaddād writes:

> Fired with enthusiasm to wage war against the Crusaders, *jihād* was his favorite topic of discussion. Always seen making preparations for strengthening his forces, seeking out men and materials, and paying attention to anyone who spoke about *jihād*, he gladly abandoned his hearth and home, family and children. He took to the life of the camp, where a wind could uproot his tent.

1 Ibn Shaddād, *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 31.

2 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 32–33.

3 *Saladin*, 99.

> Anybody encouraging him in his ambitions could easily win his respect."[1] One could make a solemn oath that after he started the war against the Crusaders, he never spent a single cent on anything save preparing for war and helping his men.[2]

Ibn Shaddād continues:

> The Sultan appeared a bereaved mother on the battlefield, deprived of her only child by the cruel hands of death. He trotted on his horse from one end of the battlefield to the other, exhorting the people to fight for the sake of Allāh. He would himself go around all the detachments with tears in his eyes, asking people to come forth for the aid of Islam.[3]

The same writer describes how Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn spent his days during the siege of Acre: "Except a sweet drink on which his physician insisted, the sultan did not take anything for the whole day."[4] "The royal physician told me that the sultan had taken only a few morsels of food from Friday to Sunday as he was unable to pay attention to anything apart from the happenings on the battlefield."[5]

Conclusive Battle of Hattin

After a series of fights and forays, a hotly contested battle was fought in the neighborhood of Tiberias beneath the hills of Hattin[6] on Saturday 25 Rabīʿ al-Ākhir 583 (4 July 1187), which gave a death-blow to the power of the Crusaders and a clear victory to the Muslims. The victory achieved by the sultan has been described thus by Lane-Poole:

> The flower of chivalry was taken. The king [of Jerusalem, Guy of Lusignan] and his brother, Reginald of Châtillon, Joscelin of Courtenay, Humphrey of Toron,[7] the Masters of the Temple and Hospital, and many other nobles were among the prisoners. . . . The rest of the chivalry of Palestine was under Moslem warders. Of the rank and file, all who were alive were made prisoners.

1 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 17.

2 Ibid., 16.

3 Ibid., 155.

4 Ibid., 155.

5 Ibid., 90.

6 In Arabic Ḥiṭṭīn. A northern Palestinian village located 8 km west of Tiberias, now with some Jewish villages founded on its site.

7 Toron (now Tibnin or Tebnine) in southern Lebanon, was a major Crusader castle, built in the Lebanon mountains on the road from Tyre to Damascus.

> A single Saracen was seen dragging some thirty Christians he had himself taken, tied together with a tent-rope. The dead lay in heaps, like stones upon stones, among broken crosses, severed hands and feet, whilst mutilated heads strewed the ground like a plentiful crop of melons. . . .
>
> The field long bore the marks of the bloody fight where "30,000" Christians were said to have fallen. A year afterwards the heaps of bleaching bones could be seen from afar, and the hills and valleys were strewn with the relics of the horrid orgies of wild beasts.[1]

Religious Ardor of the Sultan

The fateful fight at Hattin came to a close with an incident that illustrates Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's desire to protect the religion. This is how Lane-Poole describes it:

> Saladin camped on the field of battle. When his tent was pitched, he ordered the prisoners to be brought before him. The King of Jerusalem and Reginald of Châtillon [Lord of Karak] he received in his tent; he seated the King near himself, and seeing his thirst, he gave him a cup of water iced in snow. Guy drank and passed the cup to the lord of Karak: but Saladin was visibly annoyed. "Tell the king," he said to the interpreter, "that it was he, not I, that gave that man drink." The protection of "bread and salt" was not to baulk his vengeance. Then he rose and confronted Reginald, who was still standing: "Twice have I sworn to kill him; once when he sought to invade the holy cities, and again when he took the caravan by treachery.[2]—Lo! I will avenge Mohammed upon thee!" And he drew his sword and cut him down with his own hand, as he had sworn. The guard finished it and dragged the body out of the tent.
>
> The King, trembling at the sight, believed his own turn was now coming, but Saladin reassured him: "It is not the custom of kings to slay kings; but that man had transgressed all bounds, so what happened, happened."[3]

Ibn Shaddād's version of Reginald of Chatillon's execution adds that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn offered him the choice of Islam and on his refusal cut off his head. The sultan said, "Lo! I avenge Muḥammad, upon you."[4]

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1 *Saladin*, 214–15.

2 Ibn Shaddād adds that when the pilgrim caravan was treacherously waylaid by Reginald, some of his captives implored him to be merciful. Reginald, however, arrogantly turned down their request saying: "Ask your Prophet Muḥammad to come to your rescue." When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn heard of it he vowed that he would slay Reginald with his own hand if he got hold of him (*Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 127).

3 *Saladin*, 214–215.

4 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 64.

Conquest of Jerusalem

The victory at Hattin was only the prelude to the much-coveted conquest of Jerusalem by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. His intense yearning to regain the holy city has been strikingly depicted by Ibn Shaddād, who says that "the Sultan was so keen for Jerusalem that the hills would have shrunk from bearing the burden he carried in his heart."[1]

On Friday 27 Rajab 583 (2 October 1187), after a full ninety years, this first *qibla* where the Prophet ﷺ on the night of the Ascension had led the congregational prayer of the earlier prophets, came back under the banner of Islam. Furthermore, it was of excellent coincidence that the sultan entered the city on the anniversary of the Messenger's ﷺ Ascension (*miʿrāj*).[2]

Ibn Shaddād gives a graphic account of this memorable day. He writes:

> It was the victory of victories. A large crowd consisting of scholars and the nobles, traders and the laity had gathered on this joyous occasion. A number of people had come from the coastal lands upon news of the sultan's victory, and nearly all the notable theologians from Egypt and Syria came to congratulate him on his victory. Hardly any noteworthy personage of the empire was left behind. The joyful shouts of "Allāh is Great" and "There is no god but Allāh" rent the skies. After ninety years, Friday prayer was again held in Jerusalem. The cross that glittered on the Dome of the Rock was pulled down. An indescribable event as it was, the blessings and help of Allāh were witnessed everywhere on that day.[3]

A costly pulpit, which had been designed under the orders of Nūr al-Dīn Zangī twenty years earlier, was brought from Aleppo and erected in the Dome of the Rock.[4]

Benevolence of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn

The forbearance, humanity, magnanimity, and Islamic character that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn exhibited on this occasion is worth hearing from the pen of the

1 Ibid., 213.

2 The miraculous event of the journey of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ to the heavens has been alluded to in the Qur'ān (17:1): "Glorified be He who carried His servant by night from Masjid al-Ḥarām to Masjid al-Aqṣā, the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our signs!" The Messenger ﷺ was brought by the Angel Jibrīl to Jerusalem, where he offered the prayers, leading a congregation of all the prophets who had come before him. Thereafter, he was taken to the heavens to be presented before Allāh Almighty.

3 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 66.

4 ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Abī 'l-Fidā'*, 3:77.

Christian biographer, Lane-Poole, who acknowledges that the sultan's kindness of heart had conquered his desire for revenge. He writes:

> Never did Saladin show himself greater than during this memorable surrender. His guards, commanded by responsible emirs, kept order in every street, and prevented violence and insult, insomuch that no ill-usage of the Christians was ever heard of. Every exit was in his hands, and a trustee Lord was set over David's gate to receive the ransoms as each citizen came forth."[1]

Then, after describing how the people left in the holy city were ransomed and how Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, the brother of the Sultan, the Patriarch, and Balian of Ibelin[2] were each allowed to set free a thousand slaves given by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Lane-Poole continues:

> Then said Saladin to his officers: "My brother has made his alms, and the Patriarch and Balian have made theirs; now I would fain make mine." And he ordered his guards to proclaim throughout the streets of Jerusalem that all the old people who could not pay were free to go forth. And they came forth from the postern of St. Lazarus, and their going lasted from the rising of the sun until night fell. Such was the charity which Saladin did, of poor people without number.[3]
>
> Thus did the Saracens show mercy to the fallen city. One recalls the savage conquest by the first Crusaders in 1099, when Godfrey and Tancred rode through streets choked with the dead and dying, when defenseless Moslems were tortured, burnt, and shot down in cold blood on the towers and roof of the temple, when the blood of wanton massacre defiled the honor of Christendom and stained the scene where once the gospel of love and mercy had been preached. "Blessed are the merciful, for they Shall obtain mercy" was a forgotten beatitude when the Christians made shambles of the Holy City. Fortunate were the merciless, for they obtained mercy at the hands of the Moslem Sultan.

> The greatest attribute of heaven is Mercy;
> And 'tis the crown of justice, and the glory,
> Where it may kill with right; to save with pity.

1 *Saladin*, 230.

2 Ibelin was a castle in the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, built in 1141 between Jaffa and Ascalon, near Montgisard and Ramla (at modern Yavne).

3 *Saladin*, 232.

> If the taking of Jerusalem were the only fact known about Saladin, it were enough to prove him the most chivalrous and great-hearted conqueror of his own, and perhaps of any, age.[1]

The Third Crusade

The fall of Jerusalem and the terrible defeat of the Crusaders at the battle of Hattin threw the whole of Christendom into a violent commotion. Reinforcements from Europe poured forth into Palestine. Almost all the principal sovereigns and eminent generals of the Christian world, such as Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor; Richard the Lionhearted, King of England; Philip Augustus, King of France; Leopold of Austria; the Duke of Burgundy; and the Count of Flanders charged forth with their armies against the lonely sultan and his few chiefs and relatives, who had to defend the honor of Islam.

Negotiations of Peace

Both parties, locked against each other in murderous combat for five years, at last got tired of the fruitless, wearisome, and decimating struggle. They came to an agreement at Ramla in 588/1192 which recognized Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as the sovereign of the whole of Palestine, leaving the principality of Acre in the hands of the Christians. Thus ended the Third Crusade and with it the task entrusted to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn by Allāh. Lane-Poole describes the ignoble end of the Third Crusade in these words:

> The Holy War was over; the five years' contest ended. Before the great victory at Hittin in July 1187, not an inch of Palestine west of the Jordan was in the Moslems' hands. After the Peace of Ramla in September, 1192, the whole land was theirs, except a narrow strip of coast from Tyre to Jaffa. Saladin had no cause to be ashamed of the treaty. The Franks, indeed, retained most of what the Crusaders had won, but the result was contemptible in relation to the cost. At the Pope's appeal, all Christendom had risen in arms. The Emperor, the Kings of England, France, and Sicily, Leopold of Austria, the Duke of Burgundy, the Count of Flanders, and hundreds of famous barons and knights of all nations had joined with the king and princes of Palestine and the indomitable brothers of the Temple and Hospital, in the effort to deliver the Holy City and restore the vanished kingdom of Jerusalem. The Emperor was dead; the Kings had gone back; many of their noblest followers lay buried in the Holy

1 Ibid., 233–34.

Land; but Jerusalem was still the city of Saladin, and its titular king reigned over a slender realm at Acre.

All the strength of Christendom concentrated in the Third Crusade had not shaken Saladin's power. His soldiers may have murmured at their long months of hard and perilous service, year after year, but they never refused to come to his summons and lay down their lives in his cause. His vassals in the distant valleys of the Tigris may have groaned at his constant requirements, but they brought their retainers loyally to his colors; and at the last pitched battle, at Arsuf, it was the division of Mosul that most distinguished itself for valor. Throughout these toilsome campaigns Saladin could always count on the support of the levies from Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as from northern and central Syria; Kurds, Turkmans, Arabs, and Egyptians, they were all Moslems and his servants when he called. In spite of their differences of race, their national jealousies, and tribal pride, he had kept them together as one host—not without difficulty and twice or thrice a critical waver. But, the shrinking at Jaffa notwithstanding, they were still a united army under his orders in the autumn of 1192, as they had been when he first led them "on the Path of God" in 1187. Not a province had fallen away, not a chief or vassal had rebelled, though the calls upon their loyalty and endurance were enough to try the firmest faith and tax the strength of giants. The brief defection, quickly pardoned, of a young prince of his own blood in Mesopotamia only emphasizes, by its isolation, Saladin's compelling influence over his subjects. When the trials and sufferings of the five years' war were over, he still reigned unchallenged from the mountains of Kurdistan to the Libyan desert, and far beyond these borders the king of Georgia, the Catholicos of Armenia, the Sultan of Konia, the Emperor of Constantinople, were eager to call him friend and ally.

To such allies he owed nothing: they came not to aid but to congratulate. The struggle was waged by Saladin alone. Except at the last, when his brother came prominently to the front, one cannot point to a single general or counselor who can be said to have led, much less dominated, the Sultan. A council of war undoubtedly guided his military decisions, and sometimes overruled his better judgment, as before Tyre and Acre, but in that council it is impossible to single out a special voice that weighed more than another in influencing his mind. Brother, sons, nephews, old comrades, new vassals, shrewd Kady, cautious secretary, fanatical preacher—all had their share in the general verdict, all helped their Master loyally according to their ability, but not a man of them ever forgot who was the Master. In all that anxious,

laborious, critical time, one mind, one will was supreme, the mind and the will of Saladin.[1]

Death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn

On Wednesday 27 Ṣafar 589 (4 March 1193), Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the faithful ally of Islam, died in the fifty-seventh year of his life after working his way up to the summit of his ambition.[2] Thus does Ibn Shaddād describe the last days of Sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn:

> It was in the night of the twenty-seventh of Ṣafar, and the twelfth day since he fell ill, that the sultan's illness took a serious turn. He had become too weak by then. Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar, the imām of the Kallāsa Madrasa, a pious and saintly person, was requested to stay within the castle during the night so that if the sultan were to breathe his last, he might be available for recitation of the Qur'ān at the last moment. It appeared as if the time of the sultan's eternal rest was drawing near. Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar was sitting bedside, reciting the Qur'ān while the sultan lay unconscious for the last three days, regaining his consciousness only for brief intervals in between. When Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar recited the verse "He is Allāh, other than whom there is no other god, the Knower of the invisible and the visible" (Q 59:22), the sultan opened his eyes and smiled; his face lit up and he said joyfully, "Indeed, this is correct." No sooner had he uttered these words than his soul departed. It was before dawn on Wednesday, on the twenty-seventh of Ṣafar, when the sultan passed away. The day of his death was, for the Muslims, a misfortune such as they had never suffered since they were deprived of the first four caliphs. The fort, the city, and the entire world appeared to be lamenting over his death. Whenever I was told earlier that sometimes people longed to offer their own lives in place of others, I thought it was just a figure of speech; but I learned on the day the sultan died that it could really happen, for I myself was one of those who would have gladly parted with their lives if there had been the slightest possibility of saving the life of the sultan by our sacrifice.[3]

Ibn Shaddād writes that the sultan left nothing except one dinar and forty-seven dirhams when he died; nothing else did he leave by way of houses, goods, villages, gardens, or personal property.[4] He had not even enough left

1 Ibid., 358–360.
2 *Ṭārīkh Abī 'l Fidā'*, 3:90.
3 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 249–50.
4 Ibid., 6; *Saladin*, 375.

to cover his burial expenses; these had to be met by obtaining a loan in his name, while the shroud was provided by his minister and scribe, Qāḍī Fāḍil.

The Saintly Sultan

In regard to the character and disposition of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Ibn Shaddād provides the following account:

> In faith and practice the sultan was a devout Muslim, ever conforming to the tenets of the Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l-Jamāʿa. Regular in the performance of religious observances, he once said, "I have not performed a single congregational prayer alone for the past several years." Even during his illness he would send for the *imām* and force himself to perform the prayer behind him. Assiduous in offering the prayers founded on the practice of the Messenger ﷺ, he also performed the voluntary prayers during the night. If he could not somehow offer them, he made them up before the dawn prayers as allowed by the Shāfiʿī school [which he followed]. I have seen him standing behind the *imām* during his last illness and except for the three days when he had remained unconscious, he never missed his prayers. . . . The *zakāt* never became incumbent upon him since he never possessed, throughout his life, such property in estate and effects as was necessary to make him liable to it. Boundless in generosity, he gave away whatever he possessed to the poor; and at the time of his death, no more than forty-seven dirhams of silver and one dinar of gold were found in his possession. He left no other property or goods.
>
> He punctually kept all fasts during the month of Ramaḍān. He had some fasts to makeup which had been recorded by Qāḍī Fāḍil. Before his last illness he scrupulously made them up against the advice of his physician. "I do not know when death will overtake me," he said; and true to his words, he [passed away] soon after. The sultan deeply yearned to complete the pilgrimage to Makka, especially in his final year, but he never found the opportunity.
>
> He delighted in hearing the Qur'ān recited to him and often listened to three or four chapters of it recited by the battlement guards. He listened to the Qur'ān with all his heart and soul until tears trickled down his cheeks. He also had a fancy for listening to ḥadīth. He would ask everybody present to sit down and listen calmly while ḥadīth were read out to him. If any ḥadīth scholar of repute visited the town, he would himself go to attend his lecture, occasionally narrating himself his eyes brimming with tears. Sometimes he would even pause on the field of battle, between two rows to listen to ḥadīth, as this was a time of great virtue. He held to the tenets of faith so reverently

that it was on his command that a heretical mystic, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī,[1] was executed by the sultan's son, Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir.

The Sultan had an unflinching trust and confidence in the benevolence of Allāh. He used to turn with his heart and soul toward Allāh in difficulty. Once in Jerusalem, which then lay almost helpless before the besieging Crusaders. The sultan refused our request to leave the city. It was a cold winter night before Friday when I was alone with the sultan; we spent the whole night in prayer and supplication. Late after midnight I requested the sultan to take a little rest but he replied, "I think you want to sleep. Go and take a nap." After a short while, when I went to him for dawn prayers, which we usually performed together, I found him washing his hands and feet. "I didn't sleep at all," he said. After the prayer was over, I said, "I have had an idea which may be of benefit to us. You should address yourself to Allāh Almighty and beseech Him for help." He asked, "What should I do for that?" "Today is Friday," said I. "You should take a bath before leaving for the Aqsa Mosque and also make some offerings discreetly by way of charity. When you reach the mosque, offer a special prayer of two *rakʿas* between the call to prayer and the congregational prayers, at the place where the Prophet ﷺ had offered prayers during the Ascension. I have read in a ḥadīth that the supplications made at that time are favored with acceptance. You should thereafter beseech Allāh thus: 'O my Lord, having lost all resources, I turn to You for help. I now submit to You; for You alone can help Your faithful devotees to attain success at this critical moment.' I hope that Allāh will accept your supplications." The sultan did so. I was by his side when I saw his head touching the ground in prostration and tears trickling down his beard onto the prayer carpet. I did not hear what he beseeched unto the Lord, but I witnessed signs of his prayer being answered before the day was over. Dissension overtook the enemy camp, from where we got heartening news for the next few days, until they broke their camp for Ramla by Monday morning.[2]

Character of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was a devout Muslim, and the dominant aspects of his character were an acute sense of justice, forgiveness, forbearance, generosity, chivalry, honor, charity, tenderheartedness, patience, steadfastness, courage, and high aspiration. Ibn Shaddād writes that he held court twice a week, every Monday

1 Not to be confused with Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī mentioned earlier, the disciple of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī.

2 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 5–10.

and Tuesday, at which chiefs of state, scholars, jurists, and judges were in attendance. Great and small, everyone found his door open. He used to read all the petitions and personally sign the orders dictated by him. He never allowed anyone to leave his presence without meeting that person's requirement. At the same time, he kept himself busy in the remembrance of Allāh.

If anybody had any complaint to make, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn would listen patiently and give his judgment. Once, a man lodged a complaint against Taqī al-Dīn, the sultan's nephew, who was very much liked by the sultan. He was immediately summoned to the court to answer the charges. On another occasion, a man brought a suit against the sultan himself, who immediately made necessary investigations. Although the claim of the person presenting the suit was not established, the sultan granted him a robe of honor and a handsome grant before allowing him to leave the court.

The historian Ibn Khallikān writes that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, noble-hearted and forbearing as he was, overlooked the mistakes of his associates and servants; if he heard anything unpleasant, he never manifested annoyance to the person concerned. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn once made an unfulfilled request for water. He repeated his request five times and then said, "I am dying of thirst." He drank the water which was brought thereafter without saying anything more.[1] Another time when he wanted to take a bath after a prolonged illness, he found the water too hot. He asked for some cold water to be brought in. Some of the cold water splashed on the sultan, which caused him unpleasantness owing to his weakness. Cold water was brought again and this time it fell and the whole of it poured over him. He just about managed to survive the cold of it, but he simply said to the servant, "Tell me if you want to get rid of me." The servant apologized and the sultan instantly forgave him.[2]

Ibn Shaddād has narrated a number of other incidents exhibiting Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's charity and good-heartedness. He writes:

> So generous and open-handed was he that sometimes he gave away the provinces he conquered. After he had conquered Āmid, one of his generals, Ibn Qurra Arsalān, expressed a desire for the city, and the sultan granted it to him. Sometimes he sold even his personal estates and effects to present a gift to a visitor. The treasurers of the sultan always used to keep a secret balance for emergencies, for if left to himself the sultan would have given away every last cent. The sultan once remarked that there were certain people for whom

1 *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 21.

2 Ibid.

money and dust were alike, indicating that he was speaking about someone else. I know that he was indirectly referring to his own views in this regard.[1]

The sultan was so honorable that he never allowed his visitor, even if he was a pagan, to leave without a gift or some mark of recognition. The ruler of Sidon once paid a visit to the sultan, who welcomed him with open arms. The sultan not only entertained him but also explained the tenets of Islam. In addition, he regularly sent precious ice and fruits to Richard, his greatest foe, during the latter's illness.[2]

He was so noble of disposition and kind of heart that he could not witness anyone in distress without being moved. Once, an old Christian woman came to him seeking her baby. The old woman, screaming through a flood of tears, told the sultan that her baby had been taken away from her tent by a band of robbers. She said that she had been told that only he could help her to get her child back. Touched by her sorrow, the sultan broke into tears and asked his men to find out from the slave market where her baby was. After a short while her baby was brought back and the woman fell prostrate and with her head on the ground, uttering something for a very long time, then departed rejoicing with her child.[3]

Ibn Shaddād relates the sultan's kindness to orphans. Whenever he found such a child he would speak to him with affection and comfort him and present him something. If he did not have a guardian he would personally make arrangements for his upbringing. Similarly, he was always stricken to see the aged and infirm and would have a pleasant exchange with them.[4]

Courage and Fortitude

During the siege of Acre the sultan was afflicted with boils and spots from his back to his knees, making it difficult for him even to come to the table. Still, mounting his horse, he rode around the battlefield and spent the whole day inspecting his forces. When Ibn Shaddād asked how he could bear the pain, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn replied, "The pain leaves me when I am on horseback."[5]

Another time when he was unwell, he pursued the enemy for the whole night. "During his illness," says Ibn Shaddād, "the sultan's physician and I were with him in the night. He could not sleep owing to the pain he had, but

1 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 13–14.
2 *Saladin*, 355; ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib, *Al-Fatḥ al-Qussī fī 'l-Fatḥ al-Qudsī*.
3 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 26.
4 Ibid, 28; *Saladin*, 372.
5 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 18.

as the day dawned he got up and mounted his horse to face the enemy. He sent his sons to the battlefront before allowing others to take the field. I was with the sultan along with his physician; he spent the whole day on horseback until the armies retired from the battlefield in the evening. The sultan returned after giving necessary instructions for keeping watch during the night."[1]

In courage, valor, and endurance no one surpassed Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Ibn Shaddād relates that some days he circled around the enemy camp once or even twice with his reconnaissance parties. He moved fearlessly between the advancing armies during hotly contested fights. Accompanied by a spare charger, which was carried by a servant, he would make a circuit of the troops taking positions in the battlefield, and give instructions to his generals on the positioning of forces. Once, I told the sultan that he had heard ḥadīth read over to him on different occasions but never between the approaching armies during the heat of the battle. It would be a great honor to do this too. The sultan immediately ordered the ḥadīth to be read aloud to him in the midst of the battle between the rows of warriors.[2]

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was never dismayed by the enormous host brought forth by the Crusaders to oppose him. On a few occasions the enemy troops numbered five or six hundred thousand, but Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn decided to face the enemy with the slender forces under his command, and by the grace of Allāh he came out victorious, killing a large number and taking as many prisoners.[3]

During the siege of Acre, more than seventy enemy shiploads of men and munitions landed during a single afternoon. The sultan was not perturbed in the least. In one of the most hotly contested battles of that period, a fierce charge by the enemy threw the Muslim troops into disorder. The enemy forces ransacked the Muslim camp and even got to the center, pulling down the royal banner. Still, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn stood firm along with a few of his comrades and was quickly able to muster his soldiers to back him, turning the defeat into victory. The enemy suffered a heavy and murderous defeat and withdrew, leaving seven thousand of their dead on the battlefield.[4]

Once the sultan said to Ibn Shaddād, "I will tell you what my heart desires. When Allāh Almighty has put into my hands the whole of the coast, I will distribute these lands, leave my last instructions, and, bidding farewell, embark upon the sea to subdue the western isles and lands. I will never lay

1 Ibid., 19.

2 Ibid., 15; *Saladin*, 374.

3 *Al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyya*, 15.

4 Ibid., 15–16.

down my arms while there remains a single disbeliever on earth, as long as I am not stopped by death."[1]

Knowledge and Scholarship

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had a solid grounding in the teachings of Islam. He was aware of not only all the Arab tribes and their genealogy, but even the pedigree of famous Arab horses. He possessed wide knowledge of the history of the Arabs and of the wonders of the world. He was always enthusiastic about knowledge, and his courtiers and associates always learned something new from him. It has been reported by historians that he even committed the famous poetry collection *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsa* to memory.[2]

Writing about the youthful days of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Lane-Poole says:

> To judge by later years, his literary tastes tended to the theological; he loved poetry indeed, but less than keen dialectic; and to hear holy traditions traced and verified, canon law formulated, passages in the Koran explained, and sound orthodoxy vindicated, inspired him with a strange delight.[3]

Collapse of the Fāṭimids

The rise of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn signaled the fall of the ʿUbaydī Kingdom, better known as the Fāṭimids,[4] which had established its own caliphate in Egypt. It lasted for 271 years, from 296/909 to 567/1171. The Fāṭimids had introduced strange beliefs into the Islamic faith and practice, changing its tenets, doctrines, and rules of conduct and behavior until they were alien. A respected historian, Maqrīzī, has given a few examples of the orders promulgated by the Fāṭimids in his book *Al-Khiṭaṭ wa 'l-Āthār* (Plans and Monuments). He writes:

> In 362/973 the law of inheritance was amended. If a person left behind him a daughter along with a son or a nephew or uncle, the daughter excluded all others from succession. Any violation of this law was treated as an evidence of enmity against Fāṭima ﷺ, the daughter of the Messenger ﷺ. Sighting of the new moon for the beginning of a new month no longer remained neces-

1 Ibid., 17.

2 Ibid., 27.

3 *Saladin*, 73–74.

4 The Fāṭimids claimed their descent from Fāṭima, the daughter of the Messenger ﷺ, but historians are nearly unanimous that they were not even distantly related to the family of the Messenger ﷺ. The progenitor of the sect was either a Jew or Magian. Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib in *Al-Kashf ʿan Asrār al-Bāṭiniyya*, Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār in *Tathbīt al-Nubuwwa*, and Maqdisī in *Kashf mā Kānā ʿalayhi Banū ʿUbayd* have discussed the question in greater detail.

sary, as Ramaḍān and ʿĪd were ordered to be observed in accordance with the officially computed calendar. Tarāwīḥ prayers were banned throughout Egypt by a royal edict in 372/983. A man who was found in possession of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Imām Mālik was punished.

In 393/1003, thirteen persons were punished for performing *ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā* (mid-morning prayer). In 395/1005 *mulūkhiyya*,[1] which was very much liked by Egyptians, was banned because Caliph Muʿāwiya was reported to have been fond of it, as was watercress because it was said that ʿĀ'isha (the wife of the Messenger ﷺ) liked it. During the same year, curses upon the first three Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the Umayyads were ordered to be displayed prominently on the walls of all mosques, shrines, and other public buildings. Wine was made lawful in 411/1020 by the Fāṭimid caliph Ẓāhir li-Iʿzāz Dīni 'Llāh. On one hand, tumultuous scenes of extravagant luxury, debauchery, and drunkenness had become a common sight; on the other hand, famine and disease were wreaking havoc among the poor. During the period of cruelest suffering, people used to gather around the royal castle and cry "Hunger, Hunger." The callous indifference of the rulers, at last, gave rise to pillage and plunder.

In 424/1033 when the heir-apparent to the Fāṭimid throne, who was then only four years old, drove through the well-decorated bazaars of the capital, people prostrated themselves before him.

It had become almost a rule among the Fāṭimids to raise children of tender age to the throne of caliphate. Mustanṣir bi-'Llāh was only seven years when he ascended the throne; Āmir bi-Aḥkāmi 'Llāh was five years, one month, and a few days; Fā'iz bi-Naṣri 'Llāh was five years old; and ʿĀḍid li-Dīni 'Llāh was eleven at the time of being vested with the office of caliphate.[2]

The rise of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to power in Egypt marked the beginning of an era when the Shī'ite creed began to vanish with the restoration of the spiritual authority of the orthodox creed of Islam. Schools were established in many places for general instruction. Gradually, all traces of heretical beliefs and practices, which had been adopted by the people during the Fāṭimid rule of about three hundred years, were eradicated from Egypt. The historian of Egypt, Maqrīzī, writes, "The Shī'ite, Ismāʿīlī, and Imāmī creeds became so extinct that they have left no trace in the whole of Egypt."[3]

1 Resembling, though not in fact the same as, spinach, *mulūkhiyya* is the jute mallow plant (*Corchorus olitorius*), cultivated in Syria and Egypt as a pot herb.

2 Maqrīzī, *Al-Khiṭaṭ wa 'l-Āthār*, 352–59.

3 Ibid., 359.

Fāṭimid rule in Egypt was indeed a scourge for Islam. During the three hundred years of its supremacy, it continued to play cruelly with the tenets, doctrines, performances, and practices enjoined by the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. The orthodox school was looked down upon and its followers were persecuted, while the heretics, skeptics, and lowly were elevated to positions of power and authority. Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī, in his *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī Akhbār al-Dawlatayn* (The Book of the Two Gardens on the History of the Two Reigns), sums up the Fāṭimid period in these words:

> It was an affliction that Islam had to endure during the entire period of ʿUbaydī (Fāṭimid) rule. It began in 299/912 and came to an end in 567/1172. The Rāfiḍī Shī'ites came to have a dominant position under them. Oppressive tributes and taxes were levied upon the people. They had a corrupting influence on the beliefs and faith of the simple and impressionable people belonging to the hilly regions at the Syrian border, as well as the Nuṣayrīs and Druze tribes. The Assassins (Ḥashshāshīn) were also one of the Ismāʿīlī sects. The Ismāʿīlī preachers were successful among the above-mentioned tribes of the border areas owing to their ignorance and naiveté, but they could not gain influence among others. It was during their reign that the Franks captured many Muslim cities in Syria and Upper Mesapotamia. Their onslaught continued until the Atābeks came into power and the defender of Islam Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn came forward to crush their power. He regained the Islamic territories and saved the servants of Allāh from the Fāṭimid scourge.[1]

The revolutionary change brought about by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in Egypt was a herald of great religious and moral revival. Therefore, it is natural that the historians of that period have expressed satisfaction about it. Having witnessed the traces of a revolution that transformed Egypt only twenty-nine years before his birth, Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī expresses the collapse of Fāṭimid rule with the following words: "Their kingdom collapsed and with it, the age of degradation for Islam."[2] Another esteemed scholar, Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Qayyim, in his *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursala* (The Unleashed Thunderbolts) gives an impressive account of the rise of the Bāṭinīs (i.e., the Fāṭimids) and their downfall at the hands of Nūr al-Dīn Zangī and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. He says:

> The theology of the Bāṭinīs died a natural death in the East, but it began gradually to gain ground in the West until it became a deeply entrenched force to

1 Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn*, 1:201.

2 Ibid, 1:200.

be reckoned with. The Bāṭinīs assumed charge of a few cities in North Africa, whence they advanced on Egypt and succeeded in taking possession of that country. They founded Cairo. Their missionaries continued to enlist adherents and diffuse their esoteric cult. It is they who produced *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity). Ibn Sīna wrote the *Ishārāt* and the *Shifā'* and certain other tracts under their influence, for he has himself acknowledged that his father was one of the missionaries of the Fāṭimid caliph Ḥākim bi-'Llāh. During the reign of the Fāṭimids the Prophetic Path became an impious blasphemy, the collections of the ḥadīth were prohibited, and only a few remained who read these books or who secretly acted on their precepts. A dominant note of their teachings was that reason should be given precedence over revelation and the guidance of the prophets of Allāh.

Gradually, a greater part of the territories in North Africa, Egypt, Syria, and Hijaz submitted to Fāṭimid rule. Iraq also remained under their sway for about a year. Sunnīs were treated like non-Muslim citizens (*dhimmīs*) under their rule; the Jews and the Christians at least enjoyed the security of life and property above the Sunnīs. Innumerable religious scholars were executed or died in their dungeons.

At last, Allāh Most High came to the rescue of the Muslims, who were saved from the clutches of the Fāṭimids by Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Islam appeared to be at the verge of extinction in these countries, but the revolution brought about by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn granted it a new lease on life. Muslims were indeed overjoyed at this miraculous revival of Islam at a hopeless time when people had begun to ask one another, "Who can now dare to defend the faith of Allāh?" It was at such a moment that Allāh enabled His servants to regain Jerusalem from the Crusaders, whom the defenders of Islam fought with indomitable courage and chivalry."[1]

The news of the fall of the Fāṭimid kingdom was generally received with a sense of relief and pleasure by the entire Islamic world and by the Muslims of Syria in particular.[2]

Thus, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn stemmed the tide of the Crusaders and saved the Muslim world from the slavery and exploitation of Western forces for centuries to come. On top of that, he expunged a great source of evil by overthrowing the Fāṭimid Caliphate, which was spreading the contamination of the Bāṭinī and Ismā'īlī cults to other Muslim lands from its center in Egypt.

1 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursala*, 2:233–34.

2 *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn* 1:198–99.

The outlandish doctrines preached by these sects during the previous two or three centuries were responsible for the widespread intellectual waywardness of the time and the degeneration of faith and morals. Indeed, Islamic history cannot forget either of these two achievements, nor can they fail to acknowledge the debt of gratitude to the Kurdish *mujāhid* Sultan. May Allāh reward him on behalf of Islam and the Muslims a most excellent reward.

CHAPTER 11

ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām

SULTAN ṢALĀḤ AL-DĪN set himself to work in the most earnest fashion by reintroducing the orthodox doctrines of Islam in place of Shī'ite creed, establishing to that purpose a chain of educational institutions all over his wide realm and, above all, setting a personal example along with some of the Muslim rulers by following the orthodox religious precepts and codes of moral conduct. The endeavors of this heroic man successfully redirected the energies of people toward the learning and teaching of the religious sciences. As a result, we find several erudite scholars during the seventh century who had devoted themselves, body and soul, to the dissemination of Islamic teachings among their compatriots. The most outstanding example among these luminaries was Shaykh al-Islām ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1261). Renowned for his profound learning, piety, and courage, he never compromised with the corrupting influences of his time nor with the degenerate ways of the rulers of his era.

Scholarship of ʿIzz al-Dīn

ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām was born in Damascus in 578/1282. He had the honor of being a student of several eminent scholars of his day, such as Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn ʿAsākir, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, and Ḥāfiẓ Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim Ibn ʿAsākir. According to certain historians, he began his education quite late in life, but he quickly acquired such proficiency in the sciences that his contemporaries paid glowing tribute to his deep learning and brilliance of mind. Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd refers to him as *sulṭān al-ʿulamā'*, king of scholars, in some of his works. When ʿIzz al-Dīn migrated to Egypt in 639/1242, Ḥāfiẓ ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Mundhirī, the author of *Al-Targhīb wa 'l-Tarhīb*, ceased giving legal opinions (*fatwās*). When asked why, he said, "It does not behoove any jurist to give legal opinions where ʿIzz al-Dīn happens to be present."

Another scholar, Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥājib, was of the opinion that in jurisprudence ʿIzz al-Dīn excelled even Ghazālī.[1]

Dhahabī writes in his book *Al-ʿIbar* (The Exhortations):

> Along with his asceticism and scrupulousness he had attained that degree of perfection in his knowledge of jurisprudence, and had reached the status of undertaking independent reasoning and deduction.[2]

ʿIzz al-Dīn taught at the Zāwiya Ghazāliyya in Damascus for a fairly long period, in addition to holding the offices of *khaṭīb* (preacher) and *imām* in the Umayyad Mosque. Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāma relates that ʿIzz al-Dīn vehemently opposed innovations like *ṣalāt al-raghā'ib*[3] and the special prayers in the middle of the month of Shaʿbān,[4] which had become so popular in his time that several noteworthy scholars were silent and confused about them.

Al-Malik al-Kāmil[5] insisted on ʿIzz al-Dīn to accept the office of chief justice in Damascus, which he assumed reluctantly after setting a number of conditions. During the same period, Al-Malik al-Kāmil appointed ʿIzz al-Dīn as his envoy to the court of the Abbasid caliph.

Righteousness of ʿIzz al-Dīn

Among the religious scholars of Syria, ʿIzz al-Dīn was held in such a high esteem that he was received by the king with the most honorable marks of distinction. For his own part, however, ʿIzz al-Dīn never visited the king unless he was requested to do so. Being dignified, straightforward, and self-respecting, he did not like to curry favor with the king; instead, he always insisted that the king follow the course most beneficial to Islam and Muslims.

During his final illness, Sultan Al-Malik al-Ashraf, who held the principality of Aleppo after the death of his father, Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, sent his highest minister, who came to ʿIzz al-Dīn saying, "Your lover, Mūsā son of Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Abū Bakr sends his *salāms* and requests for your sick visit and supplications. He also seeks some counsel that would be of benefit to

1 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā*, 5:83.

2 As cited by Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara*, 1:141.

3 *Ṣalāt al-raghā'ib* was a special prayer of twelve *rakʿas* performed in the night of the twenty-seventh of Rajab. The people had somehow come to regard it as a highly virtuous prayer. It came into vogue in 448/1056, as described by ʿIzz al-Dīn. For details, see *Itḥāf al-Sāda*, 3:423–24.

4 On the fifteenth night of Shaʿbān a prayer of one hundred *rakʿas* was performed in a specially prescribed manner. Ibn Subkī and Imām Nawawī have declared both these prayers to be reprehensible innovations (Ibid., 3:425–27).

5 Son of Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, who held Egypt after the death of his father in 615/1218.

him in front of Allāh. Hearing this and deeming that visiting the sick was a superior worship and would have many benefits for others too, ʿIzz al-Dīn decided to proceed. The sultan's happiness knew no bounds and he kissed his hands. He had previously had some misunderstandings with ʿIzz al-Dīn on account of certain views he held,[1] for which he had remained upset at him for a very long period. The sultan implored the shaykh to forgive him for his mistake, supplicate for him, and also to bestow on him a word of advice. "So far as the request for pardon is concerned," replied ʿIzz al-Dīn, "I forgive everyone with whom I happen to be displeased; for I never sleep bearing ill will toward anyone. Instead of seeking my recompense from human beings, I desire it from Allāh alone, as the Lord has said, "One who pardons and sets things aright, his reward shall be with Allāh" (Q 42:40). As for my prayers for you," added ʿIzz al-Dīn, "I very often pray to Allāh for the well-being of the sultan, for this also means the welfare of Islam and Muslims. Allāh Almighty may grant the sultan insight and understanding of the matters which may be helpful to him in the life to come. Now, coming to the advice, it has become my duty to enjoin the right course because the sultan has asked for it. I know that the sultan is being celebrated for his valor and the brilliant victories he has won, but the Tartars are making inroads into Islamic territories. They have been emboldened by the fact that the sultan has pitched his arms against Al-Malik al-Kāmil and does not therefore have time to face the enemies of Allāh and the persecutors of Muslims. Al-Malik al-Kāmil is the elder brother of the sultan, and therefore I would ask the sultan to give up the idea of fighting against his own brother. Instead, I would advise him to turn his forces against the enemies of Islam. The sultan should make up his mind, in these critical days of his illness, to fight for the sake of Allāh alone and for restoring the ascendancy of His faith. We hope to overcome the unbelievers with the help of the sultan should Allāh restore his health. This would certainly be a great achievement, but if Allāh Almighty has willed otherwise, the sultan would undoubtedly be recompensed for his intention to come to the rescue of Islam."

1 During the sixth and seventh centuries a controversy had arisen between the Ḥanbalīs and Ashʿarīs regarding the attributes of Allāh. The former favored a literal interpretation of the Scripture, while the latter held the attributes of Allāh to be distinct from his essence but in such a way only as to forbid any direct likening of Allāh to His creatures. This difference later became a hotly contested issue between the two groups, who came to regard it as a criterion of true faith. ʿIzz al-Dīn was an Ashʿarī while Al-Malik al-Ashraf was predisposed to the Ḥanbalī school, which had initially caused a misunderstanding between the two that was later resolved in an extended discussion (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:85–95).

Al-Malik al-Ashraf thanked ʿIzz al-Dīn for his sincere advice and immediately issued orders redirecting his forces to face the Tartars instead of Al-Malik al-Kāmil's Egypt. As soon as the sultan's orders were communicated to the commander of his army, they proceeded to Qaṣīra and people became aware of the king's intent to confront the Tartars.

On Al-Malik al-Ashraf's request for further advice, ʿIzz al-Dīn said:

> The sultan is bedridden but his chiefs and officials are having rounds of pleasure; they are reveling in wine and wickedness while Muslims are burdened with new taxes and tithes. The most valuable offering the sultan can make to Allāh is that this cesspool of corruption be cleansed, illegal imposts abolished, tyranny stopped, and justice made available to the people.

Al-Malik al-Ashraf not only acted on ʿIzz al-Dīn's advice but profusely thanked him, saying, "May Allāh give you a goodly reward for performing the duty enjoined by the religion, on behalf of all the Muslims, whose well-wisher you undoubtedly are. May Allāh allow me to be your companion in Paradise." The sultan also presented one thousand Egyptian gold dinars to ʿIzz al-Dīn, who in turn refused to accept, saying, "I met you only for the sake of Allāh, and I do not want any worldly temptation to be made an additional reason for it."

Courage of ʿIzz al-Dīn before the Ruler of Syria

Al-Malik al-Ashraf was succeeded by (his brother) Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, who sought the help of the Christians against the impending threat of invasion from Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb of Egypt. In lieu of aid promised by the Christians, the city of Sidon and Shaqīf (Beoufort Castle) and few other forts were ceded to them. The friendly relations thus established by Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl encouraged the Christians to purchase arms and munitions from Muslim traders in Damascus. ʿIzz al-Dīn denounced these deals because the arms purchased by the Christians were likely to be used against Muslims. Therefore, when the arms dealers asked for his legal opinion on the matter, he warned that all such bargains were prohibited by the Sharīʿa because they would be used against their Muslim brothers. ʿIzz al-Dīn was greatly affected by the careless attitude of the king and this time of humiliation for Islam that he stopped supplicating for him in the Friday sermons. Instead, he would pray fervently after the two sermons, "O My Lord, assist the supporters of Islam and humiliate the heretics and enemies of Islam." All the believers would say *āmīn* to these prayers with great emotion. The matter was brought to the

attention of the king, who ordered ʿIzz al-Dīn imprisoned. After some time he was transferred to Jerusalem from his Damascus prison.

In the meantime, Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl, along with his allies—Al-Malik al-Manṣūr, governor of Homs, and a few Christian monarchs—converged with their armies at Jerusalem with the intention of mountain an invasion into Egypt. Although Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl had imprisoned ʿIzz al-Dīn, he felt guilty and was perturbed by ʿIzz al-Dīn's displeasure against him. He gave his handkerchief to one of his trusted counselors with instructions to present it to ʿIzz al-Dīn and tell him courteously yet exhortingly that if he so desired, his previous position would be fully restored with great honor; and, if he agreed, to bring him before the king, otherwise to imprison him in a tent beside the king's.

The counselor did as commanded. He paid his compliments and related the king's admiration for the shaykh, and then said, "Everything will be set right and your previous position restored in no time if you just kiss the king's hands and show him courtesy." History can perhaps offer few such striking examples of fearless expression, for ʿIzz al-Dīn replied:

> What a fool you are! You expect me to kiss the hands of the king when I would not like my own hands to be kissed by him. My friend, you are living in a world other than mine. Praise be to Allāh that He has not tempted me with what he has afflicted you.[1]

The counselor replied that in that case he had orders to imprison him again. The shaykh said to do as he would. Accordingly, he was placed under confinement in a tent beside that of the king, who heard him daily reciting the Qur'ān. The king one day told his Christian ally that the person who he heard reciting the Qur'ān at the moment was the chief cleric of the Muslims, but that he had been divested of his post and honors and kept under confinement because of his opposition to the cession of cities and forts to the Christians. The Christian monarch replied that if he were to have such a man as his bishop, he would have felt it his honor to sit at his feet.[2]

Shortly thereafter, Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl was defeated and the Christian forces were killed in an encounter with the Egyptian forces, and ʿIzz al-Dīn was honorably brought to Egypt. While on his way to Egypt ʿIzz al-Dīn passed through the principality of Karak. When its governor invited ʿIzz al-Dīn to settle in Karak, he replied, "This small city of yours does not befit my learning."[3]

1 Ibid., 5:101.

2 Ibid., 5:100–101.

3 Ibid., 5:81.

ʿIzz al-Dīn in Egypt

ʿIzz al-Dīn was received by the sultan of Egypt, Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, with great reverence and honor. He was appointed as preacher of the Mosque of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ ﷺ, as well as the chief justice of Egypt. He was also entrusted with the task of looking after the rehabilitation of deserted mosques and the professorship of Shāfiʿī jurisprudence at the Madrasa Ṣāliḥiyya, which the king had founded.

Fearlessness of ʿIzz al-Dīn

An administrator at the palace named Fakhr al-Dīn ʿUthmān had come to wield great influence over the king. This man had a drum house constructed over the roof of a mosque where the drums started to be beaten. When ʿIzz al-Dīn came to know of it, he, in his capacity as chief justice and minister of mosques, ordered the structure of the drum house pulled down. He declared Fakhr al-Dīn ʿUthmān unreliable as a witness in a court of law and resigned from the post of chief justice in protest to the blasphemous action of Fakhr al-Dīn ʿUthmān. ʿIzz al-Dīn continued to enjoy the esteem of the king who, nonetheless, did not consider it prudent to appoint ʿIzz al-Dīn as chief justice a second time.

The king's decision notwithstanding, ʿIzz al-Dīn's juristic opinions were acted upon with the same respect as before. During this period, Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb sent an embassy to the court of the caliph in Baghdad. When the Egyptian envoy was presented before the caliph, he asked the envoy if he had been commissioned by the sultan of Egypt himself. On being told that he had been charged to convey the message by Fakhr al-Dīn ʿUthmān on behalf of the sultan, the caliph replied that since Fakhr al-Dīn ʿUthmān had been declared an unreliable witness by ʿIzz al-Dīn, no credence could be given to a message conveyed through him. The envoy had to return to Egypt to obtain the orders of the sultan afresh.

There is yet another incident which attests to the fearlessness of ʿIzz al-Dīn. The sultan, who was holding public audience on the occasion of ʿĪd, was seated on the throne in a large reception hall with the princes and chiefs of the state ranged on his right and courtiers and dignitaries on his left. In front of the sultan stood all the people entitled to enter and salute the sovereign, when a voice was suddenly heard addressing the sultan by his first name: "Ayyūb, what would be your reply before Allāh if He were to ask you whether the kingdom of Egypt was given to you so that people could openly indulge in drinking bouts and you could enjoy public receptions?" "Is it—," stammered

the sultan, who was taken aback, "is it a fact?" "Yes," came the reply from ʿIzz al-Dīn. "Wine is being freely sold and consumed in that particular place in the city while people indulge in other vices too." Surprised as the sultan was, he replied, "But it is not my fault, sir, for it has been happening from the time my father held the reins of this kingdom." "Then you are one of those," admonished ʿIzz al-Dīn, "who say, 'We found our forefathers doing the like of this' (Q 26:74)." The sultan immediately gave orders to stop the sale of wine in his realm.

While returning from the court, one of ʿIzz al-Dīn's pupils asked him why he had raised the matter on that occasion. ʿIzz al-Dīn replied, "When I saw the sultan surrounded by that pomp and display I thought that he might give himself airs and become a slave to his baser self. I therefore thought it necessary to admonish him publicly." "But were you not seized with fright?" the disciple demanded further. "Not at all," replied ʿIzz al-Dīn. "I was so much seized by the awe and glory of Allāh that the sultan appeared to me as meek as a cat."[1]

Jihād with the Crusaders

These were the days when dissension among the Muslim monarchs had once again created a situation favorable to the Crusaders, who unsheathed their swords to take an offensive against Mansoura in Egypt. ʿIzz al-Dīn accompanied the forces sent to retake the city from the Christians. A historian of a century later, Ibn al-Subkī, wrote that ʿIzz al-Dīn's prayer for the success of Muslim forces was readily answered by Allāh. The reinforcements of the Crusaders could not reach them after their ships were taken by a gale, which drowned quite a few of them.[2]

The Mongols had also started raiding and plundering Muslim territories during that time. On one occasion, there was an imminent danger of a Mongol invasion of Egypt, but the sultan and his commanders were so disheartened that they could not muster the courage to face the Mongol hordes. ʿIzz al-Dīn encouraged the sultan to fight the Mongols. He even assured the sultan of success against them. Finally, the sultan agreed to ʿIzz al-Dīn's suggestion, but because he was short on funds, he sought the man's advice about raising the necessary money through loans from businessmen. But ʿIzz al-Dīn advised, "First bring the ornaments your women and those your dignitaries

1 Ibid., 5:82.

2 Ibid., 5:84.

and nobles have in their possession. These are all prohibited by the Sharīʿa and should be used for meeting the expenses of this expedition. And if you still need money, then you can raise it through loans." Surprising though it may seem, the king and his nobles brought out without complaint all the jewelry and valuables they possessed, as the shaykh had directed. The riches thus brought forth were enough to meet the expenses of raising an adequate force to face the Mongols, who were defeated by the Egyptian army as predicted by ʿIzz al-Dīn.

Auctioning the State Dignitaries

An even more surprising incident of the shaykh's life, as described by historians, relates to his insistence upon auctioning those dignitaries of the sultan's court whom he held to be the property of the state treasury, since they were slaves who had not been emancipated in accordance with the provisions of the Sharīʿa. These chiefs of the state were recruited as royal levies of Turkic origin and had risen to positions of authority and wielded great influence in the government of Egypt. One of them even held the post of minister to the sultan.

ʿIzz al-Dīn issued a *fatwā* that these chiefs were still slaves in accordance with the rules of the Sharīʿa, and should be treated as such until they were formally emancipated. The population of Egypt immediately ceased cooperating with those chiefs and dignitaries, who were placed in such a disadvantaged position that they had to call on the shaykh and inquire what he proposed to do with them. ʿIzz al-Dīn told them plainly that he would sell them in a public auction on behalf of the state treasury and thereafter they would be emancipated, as provided by the Sharīʿa. They appealed to the sultan that the shaykh wanted to humiliate them. The sultan tried to placate ʿIzz al-Dīn, as the historians have recorded, but he remained adamant.

During their discussion, the sultan told ʿIzz al-Dīn that he should not concern himself with affairs of state and also, as it has been reported, said something which was taken ill by ʿIzz al-Dīn. The shaykh returned to his house and announced his decision to leave Egypt immediately. He got his possessions together and prepared his family to leave. The news spread like wildfire in Cairo, and a broad swathe of the city's population, including pious folk, scholars, and traders, went behind ʿIzz al-Dīn. The matter was brought to the notice of the sultan, who was also told that if ʿIzz al-Dīn went away from Egypt, his kingdom would also come to an end. Extremely worried by the rapidly deteriorating situation, the sultan personally went to retrieve ʿIzz

al-Dīn, who had by then left the city. The sultan was compelled at last to give in to ʿIzz al-Dīn, and he was allowed to auction off the chiefs.

The chief minister continued in his attempt to dissuade the king, but, failing in his efforts, he decided to kill ʿIzz al-Dīn. He went with his entourage, sword in hand, to ʿIzz al-Dīn's house and knocked at the door. ʿIzz al-Dīn's son, who came out to answer the door, went back in and told his father what he had seen. But the shaykh calmly said, "My son, your father is not lucky enough to be slain in the way of Allāh." ʿIzz al-Dīn came outside without the slightest trace of fear on his face. As soon as the minister saw ʿIzz al-Dīn, he was overtaken by a flutter and the sword fell from his hand. With tears in his eyes he humbly repeated the question, "My lord, what do you want to do with us?" "I will auction you," was the shaykh's reply. "And where will you spend the sale proceeds?" the minister demanded again. The shaykh replied crisply, "On the welfare of Muslims." The minister asked again, "Who will collect the sale price?" ʿIzz al-Dīn replied, "I will."

The minister at last agreed to be sold by the shaykh, who auctioned him along with the others. As a mark of respect to the position held by these dignitaries, the shaykh fixed a higher price for each and asked them to deposit the sale price. The money collected in this way was spent on welfare projects, while the chiefs were granted their warrant of emancipation.[1] Ibn al-Subkī writes, "Such an incident was never before heard of about anyone." This is perhaps the only example of its kind recorded by history of such deference and veneration accorded a scholar.

ʿIzz al-Dīn and the Kings of Egypt

Egypt witnessed quite a few political upheavals during Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn's stay in the country. When he arrived in Egypt, a monarch of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī's dynasty, Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, was ruling over the country. He was succeeded by his son Al-Malik al-Muʿaẓẓam Tūrān Shāh, after whom the Turkic chiefs seized the reins of government. They also held ʿIzz al-Dīn in high esteem, and the celebrated Turk Sultan Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars was especially devoted to the shaykh. It was on ʿIzz al-Dīn's advice that, after the fall of Baghdad and the end of the Abbasid Caliphate, Sultan Baybars invited the uncle of the last caliph Mustaʿṣim bi-'Llāh and Abū 'l-Qāsim Aḥmad, whose title was Al-Mustanṣir, to Cairo in 659/1261 and settled them there with all honor and respect. The first to take the oath of

1 Ibid., 5:84–85

allegiance was ʿIzz al-Dīn; next came Sultan Baybars, followed by the chief justice, Tāj al-Dīn.[1]

Sublime Character

ʿIzz al-Dīn was as celebrated for his generosity, kindness, and humanity as he was for his profound knowledge and piety. Qāḍī Badr al-Dīn ibn Jamāʿa relates that when ʿIzz al-Dīn was still in Damascus, a slump in prices once overtook the market. When the prices of groves suffered a steep fall, ʿIzz al-Dīn's wife gave him an ornament to purchase a grove so that they might spend the summer in it. ʿIzz al-Dīn sold the ornament and gave away the sale proceeds in charity. Later, when his wife asked if he had purchased the grove, ʿIzz al-Dīn replied, "Yes, but it is in Paradise. I saw many poor people in great distress, so I spent the money on them." His wife said, "May Allāh reward you."[2] Qāḍī Badr al-Dīn also writes that ʿIzz al-Dīn gave as freely when he was poor as when he was wealthy. If he had nothing to give to a beggar, he would part with a portion of his turban.

ʿIzz al-Dīn was as equally courageous and truthful before himself as before the kings and nobles. Ibn al-Subkī and Suyūṭī write that once during his stay in Egypt, ʿIzz al-Dīn made a mistake in a certain juristic opinion he gave. As soon as he came to know of his mistake, he had an announcement made that the people should not act on that opinion because it was wrong.[3]

Ibn al-Subkī relates that ʿIzz al-Dīn was also favored with inner enlightenment. His fearlessness, disregard for worldly power, fame, and riches, and, above all, his unflinching faith and trust in Allāh showed that he had attained purity of the heart. In fact, Ibn al-Subkī explicitly states that ʿIzz al-Dīn was a disciple of the famous spiritual teacher Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, who had authorized him to guide others in the mystic path.[4] ʿIzz al-Dīn also had the opportunity of meeting and remaining in the company of another highly regarded mystic, Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī.[5]

Enjoining Virtue and Forbidding Evil

ʿIzz al-Dīn preached and acted on the Qur'ānic dictum to enjoin virtue and forbid evil, no matter what dangers and hardships one might have to face

1 *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara*, 2:49.
2 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:82–83.
3 Ibid., 5:83; *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara*, 1:142
4 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:83.
5 *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara*, 1:14.

for it. In one of his letters addressed to Sultan Al-Malik al-Ashraf, he wrote, "What we claim is that we are the helpers, friends, and troops of Allāh, and any warrior who is not willing to expose himself to danger cannot be called a warrior.[1]

In ʿIzz al-Dīn's view, the scholar's two weapons were his knowledge and eloquence, both of which should be fully utilized in the endeavor for righteousness. In another letter to the sultan, he wrote:

> Allāh has enjoined upon us to strive and fight for His religion. Just as you have your swords and lances for arms, we have our knowledge and discourse; and as it does not befit you to sheathe your sword from the heretics and polytheists, similarly we cannot hold our tongues against the innovators and dissenters."[2]

ʿIzz al-Dīn considered it imperative for scholars to be ever willing to face dangers in the fulfillment of their sacred obligation, and to enjoin the right course, no matter the cost. Thus, he vehemently disagreed with those religious scholars who did not consider it lawful to expose themselves to avoidable dangers. His commentary on the Qur'ānic verse "Do not cast yourselves, by your own hands, into destruction" (Q 2:195) amply bears out his view in this regard:

> To risk one's life for the honor and ascendancy of the Faith is permitted by the Sharīʿa. Moreover, it is enjoined on all able-bodied persons to wage war in the way of Allāh and fight the unbelievers. Thus, it is lawful to expose oneself to danger, under the provisions of the Sharīʿa, for [the sake of] enjoining right and forbidding wrong. However, if anyone feels that he might lose his life in the venture, the command loses its obligatory character for him but it nevertheless remains a commendable act. Thus, they are definitely wrong who think that it is not lawful to risk one's life for the purpose. In short, if anybody gives preference to himself over Allāh, He will give preference to others over Him; if anybody seeks the pleasure of Allāh at the cost of offending others, Allāh will not only bless him but also make others pleased with him. If anybody, on the other hand, wants to gratify others by displeasing Allāh, He will be displeased with him and also cause others to be disappointed with him.[3]

An Arab poet has rightly expressed the same idea in this verse:

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1 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:95.

2 Ibid., 5:9–12.

3 Ibid., 5:91.

If only I were to acquire the sweetness of your love, even if life be bitter
If only you were to be pleased with me, even if the whole world be annoyed

ʿIzz al-Dīn lived up to this ideal and never hesitated to sacrifice his hearth, home, life, or honor for what he believed to be the correct and righteous path enjoined by the Sharīʿa.

Writings of ʿIzz al-Dīn

He was an erudite scholar, a broad-minded jurist, and a successful teacher. In scholarship, too, he was equally celebrated. His two best-known works are *Al-Qawāʿid al-Kubrā* (The Greater Book of Legal Maxims) and *Kitāb Majāz al-Qur'ān* (The Book of Qur'ānic Metaphors). Ibn al-Subkī says of them, "These books of ʿIzz al-Dīn mark him as an outstanding scholar of profound knowledge in the religious sciences."[1] He later summarized both of these books has also praised two other books, *Shajarat al-Maʿārif* (The Tree of the Gnostic Sciences) and *Al-Dalā'il al-Mutaʿalliqa bi 'l-Malā'ika wa 'l-Ins* (The Proofs Pertaining to the Angels and Humans).

In addition to these writings, one more book by ʿIzz al-Dīn called *Maqāṣid al-Ṣalāt* (Objectives of the Prayer) was widely read during his own lifetime. Thousands of copies of this work were copied.[2] ʿIzz al-Dīn also left a voluminous collection of juristic opinions (*fatwās*), which is regarded as a valuable collection of legal precepts according to the Shāfiʿī school.

ʿIzz al-Dīn was perhaps the next scholar in Islam after Ghazālī who set forth to define and delineate the objectives and nuances of the religious rulings and the secrets and subtleties of the Sharīʿa. In the introduction to his famous treatise, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha*, Shāh Waliyyullāh, the ḥadīth scholar of Delhi and the greatest authority on the subject, has acknowledged his debt to three authorities: Ḥujjat al-Islām al-Ghazālī, Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī, and Shaykh al-Islām ʿIzz al-Dīn.[3]

ʿIzz al-Dīn's Death

ʿIzz al-Dīn died in the eighty-third year of his life, on 9 Jumādā 'l-Ūlā 660 (April 1 1262). Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars, then the king of Egypt, was severely aggrieved by his death and said that it was Allāh's will to decree the shaykh's death in his rule. He accompanied the funeral of the shaykh, along with the

1 Ibid., 5:103.
2 Ibid., 98.
3 *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha*, 1:6.

dignitaries, chiefs, and royal forces and even gave shoulder to the bier and took part in the actual burial.

Witnessing the enormous funeral procession passing by the side of the royal palace, the king said to one of his councilors, "My kingdom has been strengthened today. If this man, who was the resort of the masses, would have just made a gesture [against me], my rule would have vanished. Now that he has died, I am confident about the endurance of my rule."[1]

1 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:84.

CHAPTER 12

The Tartars: The Scourge of God

Causes of the Tartar Invasion

In the seventh/thirteenth century, Islam was confronted with another danger, one unparalleled in the history of the world, which came close to wiping it out of existence. This was the invasion of the wild and savage hordes of the Tartars, who issued forth from the steppes of Central Asia and overpowered almost the whole of the Islamic world with lightning speed.

The immediate cause of the Mongol invasion can be traced to a previous blunder of ʿAlā al-Dīn Muḥammad, the shāh of Khwarizm.[1] A body of traders arriving from Mongolia had been put to death, and when Genghis Khan, the Mongol ruler, deputed an embassy to inquire into the reasons for it, Muḥammad responded by killing the envoy too. On receiving the news of this outrage against proper international conduct, Genghis Khan loosed a whirlwind of savagery upon the world of Islam.

However, if one were to look into the moral behavior and attitudes of ancient nations, particularly those relating to the Children of Israel as well as their destruction and massacre, demolition and sacrilege of Jerusalem, and the reasons therefor described in the Qur'ān,[2] one can clearly see with

1 Khwarizm was the area south of the Aral Sea on the lower course of the Amu Darya (Oxus River). It now forms part of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

2 To observe the religio-moral standpoint of the Scripture on the downfall of the nations, one need look at the following verse of the Qur'ān: "We declared to the Children of Israel in the Scripture, 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become highly arrogant.' When the first of these warnings was fulfilled, We sent against you servants of Ours with great force, and they ravaged your homes. That warning was fulfilled, but then We allowed you to prevail against your enemy. We increased your wealth and offspring and made you more numerous—whether you do good or evil it is to your own souls—and when the second warning was fulfilled [We sent them] to shame your faces and enter the place of worship as they did the first time, and utterly destroy whatever fell into their power. Your Lord may yet have mercy on you, but if you do the same again, so shall We: We have made Hell a prison for those who defy [Our warning] (17:4–8).

the insight provided by scripture into the nature of the cycle of history: that the reason for converting the Islamic world into a vast charnel house was not a solitary act of cruelty on the part of a reckless and haughty sovereign. As the Qur'ān indicates, it was certainly not due to the mistake of a single individual that the storm of death and destruction burst forth on the entire world of Islam. If we were to cast a glance at the religious, moral, social, and political conditions of the Muslim people in those days, there would be no difficulty in finding out the reason for this calamity. Such a survey would amply reveal that the carnage did not take place all of a sudden. It had deeper and more far-reaching reasons than those narrated hitherto by historians. We shall have to look for these reasons in the political situation and the social condition of Muslim society a century or more before the Mongol invasion.

After the death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in 589/1193, the vast empire carved out by him split up into several independent principalities and kingdoms headed by his sons or other successors. Like many other founders of an empire, his successors did not possess the talent of their predecessor, and they fought each other for a fairly long time. Some of these did not even hesitate to seek the assistance of the Crusaders against their own brethren, an instance of which has already been cited in the previous chapter. The whole of the Islamic world was, in fact, in a state of chaos. Nowhere was to be found peace and tranquility; a moral and social disintegration was at work, which was clearly visible in the rapidly deteriorating political situation. The Crusaders were again making inroads into the Muslim territories and had recaptured lands emancipated from their clutches by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. All those factors had already contributed to the repeated famines and epidemics. A fertile country like Egypt was so devastated by the fratricidal warfare between Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil and his nephew Al-Malik al-Afḍal that when the Nile failed to flood in 597/1201, the country was overtaken by such a severe famine that the people had to resort to cannibalism.[1] Death stalked over the land, killing people in such large numbers that the dead had to be buried without shrouds. The historian Abū Shāma relates that Sultan Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil provided shrouds for 220,000 dead bodies in a single month. People began to take to canine and human flesh without any feeling of revulsion; innumerable children were eaten away. Ibn Kathīr writes that a stage came when the children and youth of tender age were all eaten up and people began to kill one another to stay their hunger.[2] These were grim reminders of Allāh calling people to

1 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*,13:26.

2 Ibid.

sincere repentance for their sins and mending their ways. The ravages of famine and pestilence were followed by a severe and widespread earthquake that hit a region spanning Syria, Asia Minor, and Iraq. The devastation and destruction of the earthquake can be judged from the fact that in the town of Nablus[1] and its surrounding districts, 20,000 people were crushed in fallen houses. Another historian writes in *Mir'āt al-Zamān* that "eleven hundred thousand"—that is, 1,100,000—people died in this earthquake.[2]

On the one hand, these natural calamities were visited upon the Islamic world with unwelcome regularity; on the other, fratricidal feuds and forays continued unabated. In 601/1205, two chieftains belonging to the same family, Qatāda al-Ḥusaynī of Makka and Sālim al-Ḥusaynī of Madīna, were locked in heated battle.[3] In 603/1206 the deadly feuds between the Ghorids of Afghanistan and the ruler of Khwarizm flared up, which encouraged the Muslims to waste their energy and power by shedding each other's blood.[4] This was the state of affairs on the one side, while Christendom had mounted another crusade on the other,[5] barely two years after Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's death, and landed its forces on the Syrian coast in 604/1207. The rulers of Upper Mesapotamia (Jazīra) were secretly in league with the Franks[6] in 607/1210, while Damietta in Egypt, a city of considerable military importance, had fallen to the Crusaders in 616/1219.[7]

In the caliphal metropolis of Islam, Baghdad, the magnificence and splendor of the caliph's court, copied from the etiquettes and ceremonies observed by the Arabian and Byzantine emperors, had touched the summit of extravagance. It is difficult to imagine the wealth amassed by such personal servants of the caliphs as pages, cupbearers, wardrobe attendants, who often entered service merely as slaves. The annual income from the property acquired by ʿAlā al-Dīn al-Ṭabrasī al-Ẓāhirī, a slave purchased by Caliph Ẓāhir, is reported to have been as much as 3,000 dinars. The house he built in Baghdad was outstanding in its size and beauty. Similar was the case with other state officials: Mujāhid al-Dīn Aybak al-Duwaydār al-Mustanṣirī and Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ghanī ibn Fākhir Firāsh, to name only two. The former

1 In the West Bank in present-day Palestine, also known as Shechem.

2 The estimate appears to be somewhat exaggerated.

3 Ibid., 13:41.

4 Ibid., 13:45.

5 A general tax known as the Saladin tithe was imposed in 1198 for the recovery of Palestine by Pope Innocent the Third.

6 Ibid., 13:58–59.

7 Ibid., 13:79.

had an annual income of 500,000 dinars, while the latter, though an illiterate man, lived like a prince. Historians have left staggering accounts of the lavish expenditures on the weddings of their sons and daughters. On the other hand, the teachers of the celebrated Madrasa Mustanṣiriyya were given such paltry sums as didn't compare to the wages paid to the lowest-ranking state official. The most erudite scholars and professors did not get more than twelve dinars a month, while the servant of Sharābī, a governor under the Abbasid regime, could spend 4,000 dinars on a wedding and pay 3,000 for a bird brought to him from Mosul.[1]

Royal processions for the caliphs were held on ʿĪd, to mark the anniversary of their accession to the throne and to seize upon this occasion as an opportunity for ostentatious display of royal pomp and pageantry. The whole of Baghdad came out to witness these processions in a free and easy mood, amusing and entertaining themselves completely unconcerned even of the obligatory congregational prayers. In 640/1242 the royal procession taken out on the occasion of ʿĪd concluded after nightfall, with the result that most of the people witnessing the procession performed the ʿĪd prayers just before midnight.[2] Again, in 644/1246, a large number of people missed the prayers on the occasion of ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā and performed them at the time of sunset.

The usual mode of paying homage to the caliph was to bow almost to the ground, or touch the ground with one's nose, but nobody even felt in it anything opposed to the teachings of the Sharīʿa or degrading to the freedom and honor of one's character. Confiscation of private property had become a common affair; illegal gratification by officials was widely prevalent; immodesty and gross misconduct were on the rise. The Bāṭinīs, charlatans, and swindlers, were basking in sunshine; everyone seemed to be after wealth; love of music had grown almost into a craze. In short, the common pursuits of people and the social and moral disintegration of society threw a lurid light on the state of chaos then prevailing in the Muslim world.[3]

This was the time when the Mongols were devastating Turkistan and Iran and were casting a covetous glance in the direction of Baghdad. "The year 626/1229 began," writes Ibn Kathīr, "with the indecisive yet bloody battles between the monarchs of the house of the Ayyūbids." Such a state of chaos prevailed in Baghdad, the center of the caliphate, that from 640/1242 to 643/1245, the caliph could make no arrangements for sending out ḥajj parties

1 For details, see Ibn al-Fūṭī, *Al-Ḥawādith al-Jāmiʿa*; Ghassānī, *Al-ʿAsjad al-Masbūk*.

2 *Al-Ḥawādith al-Jāmiʿa*, "Events of 640/1242," 141.

3 Nājī Maʿrūf, "ʿAṣr al-Sharābī bi-Baghdād," *Al-Aqlām*.

nor for the re-shrouding of the Kaʿba. For twenty-one days, the walls of the holy shrine remained without cover, which was taken by people as an ill omen by the people. Aḥmad Abū 'l-ʿAbbās succeeded his father, Caliph Mustaḍī', in 575/1180, taking the title Al-Nāṣir li-Dīni 'Llāh. He ruled for forty-six years. His reign was the longest ever enjoyed by any Abbasid caliph yet perhaps also the darkest of all the regimes in the House of ʿAbbās. Historians have severely criticized his regime for tyranny and misadministration. Writes Ibn al-Athīr:

> He was a tyrant who mistreated the populace. Iraq was a devastated land during his reign. Much of its population migrated to neighboring countries, and their possessions were confiscated by the caliph. He often gave contradictory orders, rescinding orders he had issued a day earlier. . . . Being much too interested in sports and pastimes, he had prescribed a special uniform which could be put on only by those permitted to take part in gymnastics and athletics. His orders so severely curtailed the sports that these activities practically came to an end in Iraq. His interest in entertainment had grown almost into a craze. . . . Iranians accuse him of inviting the Mongols to attack the Muslim territories[1] and hatching a conspiracy for the same.[2]

Al-Nāṣir li-Dīni 'Llāh died in 622/1225, and a year later Al-Mustanṣir bi-'Llāh (r. 623–640/1226–1242) ascended the throne.[3] He was a just, mild, benevolent, and pious ruler, recalling the rightly guided caliphs,[4] but unfortunately he did not get enough time to reform the administration. He was succeeded by his son Al-Mustaʿṣim bi-'Llāh in 640/1242. He too was a pious and just sovereign who never touched wine or indulged in indecent acts. He had committed the Qur'ān to memory and fasted the Mondays and Thursdays in addition to the months of Ramaḍān and Rajab. He is reported to have been punctual in the performance of prayers but, according to Ibn al-Athīr, he was too mild, lacked foresight, and was greedy and miserly in wealth matters.

In 642/1244, a man by the name of Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-ʿAlqamī[5] was appointed prime minister by Caliph Mustaʿṣim. Disorders and disturbances were a source of constant trouble in Baghdad, especially

1 In order to weaken the kingdom of Khwarizm.

2 *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 12:181.

3 Ẓāhir succeeded Nāṣir in 622/1225, while Mustanṣir ascended the throne a year later in 623/1226, after Ẓāhir's death.

4 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 13:159.

5 His full name was Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Muḥammad al-ʿAlqamī.

when quarrel broke out between Sunnīs and Shī'ites in 655/1257. It is reported that in these riots the Shī'ite quarters, including those of the relatives of Ibn al-ʿAlqamī, were plundered, which led him to seek revenge from the Sunnīs.[1] Although the danger of the Mongol invasion was hovering over Baghdad, a great reduction was made in the armed forces on the advice of Ibn al-ʿAlqamī. The cavalry were reduced to a mere 10,000, and their allowances and promotions were withheld. The disbanded soldiers were directed to take to trade, with the result that many of them were later on seen begging for alms in bazaars and in front of mosques. Islam was reduced to the state of imbecility, which led many poets to compose elegies to lament the helplessness of the Muslim peoples.[2]

Mustaʿṣim was personally a man of righteous character. He also wanted to reform the administration and bring peace and prosperity to the realm, but he unfortunately lacked the courage, zeal, and capability of the founders of empires, which alone could have saved the situation by breathing new life into the then tottering society and the administration. It has happened more than once that the last monarch of any ruling dynasty was just and wise, virtuous, and humane, but that the degeneration of social and political order had reached a point in his time where decay and downfall of the dynasty was the only natural outcome. This was the case with Mustaʿṣim, too, whom divine providence had chosen to wear a badge of infamy, although he was better than most of his predecessors and desired deeply to set right the fast deteriorating situation.

It is doubtless true that a group of people, pure in spirit and righteous in conduct, were there teaching and preaching in the mosques and seminaries of Baghdad. But those with money and authority had grown so corrupt that a historian of that age, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, had this to say in description of the prevailing conditions:

> The desire to acquire estates and possessions has become a craze with these people, who never think of the community's welfare. They are so engrossed in feathering their own nests that it can never be deemed as a rightful course. The officials of the government are all tyrants who are obsessed with the idea of amassing as much wealth as possible. . . . This is a most dangerous state of affairs, for a government can coexist with unbelief but never with tyranny.[3]

1 Ibid., 13:196.

2 Ibid., 13:201.

3 Nājī Maʿrūf, "ʿAṣr al-Sharābī bi-Baghdād."

In the eastern part of the Islamic world, the kingdom of Khwarizm, having risen toward the end of the fifth century of the Muslim era on the ruins of the Seljuq empire, held sway over a broad span of the Islamic territories, excluding the dominion of Seljuq sultans over parts of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Hijaz, and Asia Minor, and that of the Ghorids in Afghanistan. Sultan ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwārizm Shāh (r. 596–617/1200–1220) was one of the most powerful Muslim monarchs, perhaps the greatest sovereign of his day. Harold Lamb writes in his *Genghiz Khan*:

> In the centre of Islam, Mohammed Shah of Kharesm had enthroned himself as war lord. His domain extended from India to Baghdad, and from the sea of Aral to the Persian Gulf. Except for the Seljuq Turks, victors over the crusaders and the rising Memluk dynasty in Egypt, his authority was supreme. He was the emperor, and the Kalif—who quarreled with him but might not deny him—was restricted to the spiritual authority of a pope.[1]

Muslim historians have not mentioned any noticeable personal laxity in the character or moral behavior of Khwārizm Shāh. On the other hand, they speak of him as a brave and chivalrous ruler, just and pious, but there is no denying that he spent his prowess and capabilities in subjugating the Muslim kingdoms around his dominions. He forced the Seljuqs in the northwest of his territory to retreat to the farthest end, while restraining the westward ambitions of the Ghorids by subjugating Khurasan, Mazandran,[2] Kirman, Ghazni and Transoxiana. These ceaseless wars of Khwārizm Shāh had worn out his troops, who had to strain every nerve in achieving the victories they had so far. Apart from the phobia normally created by continuous warfare over a long period of time, the conquest of the most fertile and industrially developed areas had brought to the capital of Khwārizm Shāh all that toll and labor could produce, along with the attendant vices of opulence and luxury. It is difficult to find any detailed account of these social ills in the history of the time, most of which are concerned with the descriptions of kings and emperors. Unfortunately, however, the treatises, sermons, and various monographs and discourses of saints and preachers, which would have thrown a lurid light on the subject, were all destroyed by the Mongolian onslaught. There is hardly any reason to attribute the following statement by Harold Lamb to religious prejudice or exaggeration:

1 Lamb, *Genghiz Khan*, 120.

2 Mazandran was a province to the south of Caspian Sea bounded on the west by Gilan, and on the south by the province of Astarbad.

> It was a martial world, appreciative of song, with an ear not unmusical. A world beset by inward throes, slave-ridden, wealth gathering, and more than a little addicted to vice and intrigue. It left the management of its affairs to extortioners and its women to the custody of eunuchs, and its conscience to the keeping of Allāh.[1]

The sultans of Khwarizm made the same fatal mistake that the Moors in Spain made—an unpardonable blunder under the divine law of retribution governing the historical process. They set body and soul about extending and strengthening the bounds of their domain and subjugating their enemies, but they never tried to diffuse the final message of Allāh Most High and enlist adherents to their faith from the neighboring lands, which constituted a world different from their own. Quite apart from the religious fervor which should have diverted their energies toward this imperative task, common sense as well as political foresight dictated the same course, which would have permanently won over a vast but hostile population to their side, and thus saved themselves and other Muslims from the tragic fate that was soon to engulf all of them.

Such were the conditions when the Mongols issued forth from the steppes of Mongolia under Genghis Khan[2] and swooped down upon Iran and Turkistan, the eastern part of the Islamic world, like a scourge from Allāh. By 656/1258, the Mongols had reached the center of Islam, Baghdad, converting it into a shambles, in seeming fulfillment of the Qur'ānic dictum to "Guard against a chastisement which cannot fall exclusively on those of you who are wrongdoers, and know that Allāh is severe in punishment" (Q 8:25).

Khwārizm Shāh's Folly

The events that precipitated this calamity were that Genghis Khan sent a message to Khwārizm Shāh suggesting that, since each of them headed a vast empire, it would be in their interest to encourage trade between their subjects. He wanted traders be allowed to move freely between the two realms, purchasing and selling their goods without any undue restriction. Khwārizm Shāh agreed to the proposal, and tradesmen began to ply freely between the two kingdoms. The interchange of traders, however, was soon followed by

1 *Genghiz Khan*, 117.

2 Genghis Khan, whose name was Temüjin, was proclaimed Khakan in 602/1206. He attacked the dominions of Khwārizm Shāh in 615/1218, and died in 624/1227. In 656/1258, the Mongols invaded Baghdad under Hulagu.

an act of folly which has been graphically described by Harold Lamb, whose accounts agree with those left by Muslim historians.[1] He says:

> But the Mongol's experiment with trade came to an abrupt end. A caravan of several hundred merchants from Karakorum was seized by one Inaljuk,[2] governor of Otrar, a frontier citadel belonging to the Shah. Inaljuk reported to his master that spies were among the merchants—which may very well have been the case. Mohammed Shah, without considering the matter over much, sent to his governor an order to slay the merchants, and all of them, accordingly, were put to death. This, in due time, was reported to Genghis Khan, who dispatched envoys at once to the Shah to protest. And Mohammed saw fit to slay the chief of the envoys and burn off the beards of the others.
>
> When the survivors of his embassy returned to Genghis Khan, the master of the Gobi went apart to a mountain to meditate upon the matter. The slaying of a Mongol envoy could not go unpunished; tradition required revenge for the wrong inflicted. "There cannot be two suns in the heavens," the Khan said, "or two Kha Khans upon the earth."[3]

The Tartar Invasion

Thus the storm burst in 616/1219. Bukhara was first razed to the ground and its inhabitants put to the sword. Samarkand was reduced to ashes and its entire population passed under the sword. Other important and populous cities like Rayy,[4] Hamdan,[5] Zanjan,[6] Qazwin,[7] Merv,[8] and Nishapur[9] met the same fate. The forces of Khwārizm Shāh, the most powerful Muslim sovereign of his day, were simply swept away by the tempest of Mongol arms. Khwārizm Shāh was himself hunted from place to place by the Tartars with ruthless determination. He ultimately took refuge in an unknown island in the Caspian Sea, where he died brokenhearted, alone and abandoned.

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1 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 13:200–204; *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 13:149.

2 His name has been given as Kadar Khan (ʿUthmān, *Ṭabaqāt-i Naṣīrī*, 272).

3 *Genghiz Khan*, pp. 116–117.

4 Rayy, the ancient town of Ragha, to the southeast of modern Tehran and to the south of a land spur projecting from Alborz into the plain.

5 Hamdan lies in the fertile plain at the foot of Mt. Elmend in Iran.

6 Zanjan, a town in northern Iran.

7 Qazwin, a town in Iran in the province of Persian Irāk, 100 miles south of Tehran, at the foot of the Alborz.

8 Merv, the principal town and center of culture in the rich oasis which occupied the lower course of river Murghab, located near today's Mary in Turkmenistan.

9 Nishapur, the most important of the four great cities of Khurasan, it was one of the greatest cities of the middle ages.

Muḥammad Khwārizm Shāh had already dismembered the independent Islamic kingdoms of Iran and Turkistan, so nothing remained in the east to check the onslaught of the Mongols after his defeat. The Muslims were so seized with the terrors of the Mongols that often a lonely Tartar attacked a hundred of them but none had the courage to defend himself: every one of them was killed by the Tartar without opposition. Once a Mongol woman, dressed as a man, plundered a house and killed all its inhabitants except for a captive. It was only later that the captive somehow learned that the marauder was a woman, and then he could muster his courage to kill her. It often happened that a Mongol caught hold of a Muslim and asked him to wait till he brought a saber to slaughter him, and this poor man did not have the courage to run away in the absence of the Mongol.[1]

"The scourge of God" was the greatest of calamities before which almost the entire world of Islam was swept away as by a torrent. It left the Muslims impotent and terror-stricken. The Mongols come to be regarded as so invincible that an Arabic proverb gained currency to the effect that if anyone tells you the Tartars have suffered a defeat, don't believe him. Death and destruction was a foregone conclusion for all the lands through which the Tartar hordes passed. Palaces, mosques, and mausoleums were all leveled to the ground and trampled to dust. Historians are normally prone to be objective in their assessment of past events, but even such a cool and temperate historian as Ibn al-Athīr could not conceal his heartfelt emotion and feelings over the havoc and ruin caused by the savage ardor of the Mongols for rapine and slaughter. Speaking of these events in a harrowing strain, Ibn al-Athīr says:

> These events are so frightful and heart-rending that for several years I was in a fix whether I should narrate these happenings or not. But I have written these facts most reluctantly. In truth and reality, it is not easy to recount the tale of carnage and atrocities perpetrated on the Muslims, nor can one bear with equanimity the abasement to which they were subjected. I quite wish that my mother had not given me birth! Oh, would that I had died before I had to relate this tale of woe! Some of my friends had insisted that I should record these events, but I was still irresolute. Later it occurred on me that it would yield no profit to forgo the task. The invasion of the Tartars was one of the greatest of calamities and a most terrible visitation to which there is no parallel in the history of the world. This calamity fell on all nations, but on the Muslims more than all. If one were to claim that the world, since the

1 For details, see *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, vol. 12; *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif*, vol. 6.

time Allāh created it to the present, was never so afflicted, one would speak truthfully. For history records no other event that approaches it, and perhaps the world may not see its like again, except the calamity of Gog and Magog, till the dawn of Judgment Day. The Tartars put to the sword all men, women, and children, cut open the bellies of the pregnant women and trampled their babies to death. Verily unto Allāh do we belong and unto Him shall we return. There is no power nor might but from Allāh, the Most High, the Great. This was an affliction which overwhelmed the entire world. Like a severe torrent it suddenly swept over all the lands.[1]

The author of *Mirṣād al-ʿIbād* (The Path of Allāh's Slaves), who belonged to Hamdan and was born in Rayy and was thus an eyewitness to the Mongol invasion, has left the following account:

The year 617/1220 shall ever remain conspicuous in the histories of the world, for the hordes of heathen Tartars gained ascendancy over the Muslims in that year. The way they ravaged lands, killed people, and plundered and burned cities has a parallel neither in the days of Ignorance nor since. . . . It is enough to mention that in Rayy, where I was born and lived, in Turkistan, and in the lands extending from Byzantium to Syria, more than seven hundred thousand persons were either put to the sword or taken captive. The calamity befalling Islam and its adherents is beyond description and the holocaust is rather too well known to require any detailed enumeration. Allāh forbid, none of the monarchs and sovereigns of Islam felt the urge to defend the honor of Islam, nor were they alive to their duty of coming to the rescue of their subjects, even as they were like a shepherd unto their own people and would have to render an account on Judgment Day in regard to their safety. It was their duty to have strained every nerve to strengthen Islam and defend the faith, as Allāh orders, "Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allāh" [Q 9:41]. They should have sacrificed everything they had—their lives, riches, dominions—for the honor of Islam. This would have given heart to others and breathed a spirit of enthusiasm into the Muslims that may have contained and turned back the onslaught of the heathens. But now nothing remains except to seek the refuge of Allāh. Whatever of Islam is still visible is exposed to the danger of being completely effaced, leaving no trace of it whatsoever.[2]

1 *Al-Tārīkh al-Kāmil*, 12:147–48.

2 Dāya Rāzī, *Mirṣād al-ʿIbād*, 8–10.

Not the Muslims alone, but the entire civilized world trembled before the savage Tartar hordes. Their atrocities had caused a flutter even in those faraway corners of the then world where Tartars could have hardly been expected to carry their arms. Edward Gibbon writes in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

> The Latin world was darkened by this cloud of savage hostility: a Russian fugitive carried the alarm to Sweden; and the remote nations of the Baltic and the ocean trembled at the approach of the Tartars, whom their fear and ignorance were inclined to separate from the human species.[1]

The maddening frenzy for death and destruction aroused by Genghis Khan among the Mongols and the significance of this upsurge has been well summed up by the authors of the *Cambridge Medieval History*:

> Unchecked by human valour, they were able to overcome the terrors of vast deserts, the barriers of mountains and seas, the severities of climate, and the ravages of famine and pestilence. No dangers could appall them, no stronghold could resist them, no prayer for mercy could move them. . . . We are confronted with a new power in history, with a force that was to bring to an abrupt end, as a *deus ex machina*, many dramas that would otherwise have ended in a deadlock, or would have dragged on an interminable course.[2]

Harold Lamb continues on the impact of Genghis Khan:

> This "new power in history"—the ability of one man to alter human civilization—began with Genghis Khan and ended with his grandson Kubilai, when the Mongol empire tended to break up. It has not reappeared since.[3]

Sack of Baghdad

At last, in 656/1258, the myriad of savages and heathens advanced toward Baghdad, killing every man that came in their way, setting fire to every habitation, and trampling to dust whatever they could not possess. The metropolis of

1 Gibbon, *The History of the Decline*, 16. In the year 1238, the inhabitants of Gothia (Sweden) and Frise were prevented, by their fear or the Tartars, from sending, as usual, their ships to the herring fishery on the coast of England; and, as there was no exportation, forty or fifty of these fish were sold for a shilling (Mathew Paris, 396). It is whimsical enough that the orders of a Mogul Khan, who reigned on the borders of China, should have lowered the price of herrings in the English markets.

2 Cited in *Genghiz Khan*, 210.

3 *Genghiz Khan*, 210.

Islam, celebrated throughout the world as the center of civilization, learning, and crafts, was reduced to ashes; the account of the sack of Baghdad is too shocking and lengthy to give in detail here. Those given by contemporary historians include some eyewitness accounts of the carnage and atrocities committed by the Mongols. Ibn Kathīr writes:

> The horrors of rapine and slaughter lasted forty days, and, after the carnage was over, the most populous and beautiful city of the world was so devastated that only a few people could be seen here and there. All the streets and markets were strewn with dead bodies; heaps of corpses were to be found like small mounds from place to place. After the rains, the dead bodies began to rot, giving off the foul stench of putrid flesh, and then a deadly pestilence ravaged the town, spreading as far as the lands of Syria. Innumerable people died of this plague. The ravages of horrid famine and pestilence and soaring prices reigned over the city thereafter.[1]

Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī gives his own account of the barbarous acts of Mongols:

> Hulagu received the caliph [Musta'ṣim] in a tent while Ibn al-ʿAlqamī invited the scholars of religion and other notables of the city to be witness to the agreement between Hulagu and the caliph. When they had repaired to the Mongol camp, all were passed under the sword. They were called one by one into a tent and beheaded until none of the caliph's chiefs and counselors remained alive. It was commonly believed that if the blood of the caliph fell to the ground, some great calamity would overtake the world. Hulagu was therefore hesitant, but Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī[2] intervened to suggest that the

1 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 8:202–203 (summarized).

2 An Iranian historian (Mudarris Riḍawī) confirms the incident in his book *Aḥwāl wa Āthār-i Khwājā Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*, which has been published by Tehran University. He says that Ṭūsī was at last successful in his endeavor to dismember the caliphate and to reduce the castle of the caliph to dust. Hulagu had already been commissioned by his brother Möngke Khan to put an end to the caliphate after destroying the Bāṭinīs. Hulagu sent messages of submission to the caliph, but the correspondences came to nothing. Thereafter Hulagu consulted his counselors whether or not the stars were favorable for mounting an attack. They had strong belief in Astrology. A Sunnī astrologer, Ḥusām al-Dīn by name, who was in his court, advised Hulagu that the time was most inopportune for launching an attack on Baghdad, and that anyone who desired to harm the caliph at that hour would be defeated and suffer a grievous loss. Ḥusām al-Dīn said that if Hulagu persisted in his attempt, there would be no rains, torrents and hurricanes would devastate the world, and, what is more, the khan would be dead. Hulagu was dismayed, but he asked Ṭūsī (who was also present), "What would happen if I attack Baghdad?" "Nothing," replied Ṭūsī, "except that the khan will be monarch in place of the caliph." Thereupon Hulagu ordered Ṭūsī and Ḥusām al-Dīn to debate the issue before him. "Thousands of the Prophetic Companions ﷺ were killed," argued Ṭūsī, "yet

problem could easily be solved. The caliph should be killed, he suggested, in a way that his blood did not fall on the ground. The caliph was accordingly rolled up in a carpet and beaten to death.[1]

Wholesale massacre continued in Baghdad for more than a month. Only those could save themselves who were able to find a hiding place. Hulagu then ordered, it is related, to count the dead, who numbered eighteen hundred thousand.[2]

Christians were asked to take bacon and wine publicly. Although it was the month of Ramaḍān, the Muslims of Baghdad were compelled to participate in these drinking bouts. Wine was sprinkled in the mosques, and the call for prayer was prohibited. Nothing so despicable had happened since the foundations of Baghdad were laid: the city had come under heathen rule for the first time and had never before undergone such humiliation.[3]

In spite of all its vices and weaknesses, Baghdad was the metropolis of Islam, a center of learning, arts, and crafts, as well as a city of mosques and shrines, saints and preachers. Its destruction made the heart of every Muslim bleed; the heart-rending account of its ruin was rendered by many poets into songs of mourning. The poet Saʿdī of Shiraz, who had lived in Baghdad during his student days and seen the city in its heyday, describes the fall of Baghdad in language that shows the depth of his anguish:

The heaven would be justified if it shed tears of blood,
At the destruction of the kingdom of Mustaʿṣim, the Leader of the faithful.
If you will rise on the Day of Judgment, O Muḥammad,
Rise now to see the most severe affliction.
The blood of beauties slaughtered in the castle,
Overflows the gates of the palace and our tears stain our garments.
Beware of the turn of time and its vicissitudes;
For who knew the glorious would come to such an abrupt end.
Lo! you had seen the glory of the house of caliphs,
Where the caesars and khakans bowed low in obeisance.

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nothing happened. Even if you attribute any special piety and charismatic power to the Abbasids, look at Ṭāhir, who killed Amīn under the orders of Ma'mūn, or Mutawakkil, who was strangled to death by his sons and slaves, or else Muntaṣir and Muʿtaḍid, who were done in by their chiefs and guards. Did any calamity ever overtake the world?" (Riḍawī, *Aḥwāl wa Āthār*, 9–19).

1 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:114–15.

2 Some historians have given a lower estimate, but the figure should not be greatly off the mark, for Baghdad had then a population of around two and a half million (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:115).

3 *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya*, 5:115.

The blood of the progeny of Muḥammad's uncle
Is shed on the very earth where the sultans placed their heads.
Colored with blood, the waters of the Tigris will turn the ground red
If it flows to irrigate the desert oasis of Baṭḥā'.[1]
Defaced by the calamity it has had to suffer,
Wrinkles of waves are seen on the face of the Tigris.
No elegy is really befitting the elevated souls,
Whose minimum reward is the bliss of Allāh in Paradise.
I am shedding my tears only in sympathy,
For Muslims they were, and I hold them dear.[2]

From Baghdad, the Mongol hordes marched on to Aleppo, sacked the city, and turned to Damascus. They captured Damascus in Jumādā 'l-Ūlā 658 (April 1260). The Christian inhabitants of the city came out with presents to greet the conquerors. Ibn Kathīr, a native of Damascus, portrays the Christians' elation and the Muslims' helplessness in these words:

> The Christians came back by the Gate of Toma, carrying the cross over their heads and shouting slogans. They were praising Christianity and openly disparaging Islam and the Muslims. They bore flasks of wine, which they sprinkled in front of the mosques and on the faces of Muslims they happened to pass by, ordering the Muslims to pay homage to their emblem. Muslims could not restrain themselves for long and gathered in large numbers and pushed them back to the Cathedral of Mary, where a Christian clergyman delivered a speech praising Christianity and denigrating Islam and its followers.[3]

Thereafter Ibn Kathīr continues his description on the authority of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī's *Dhayl al-Mir'āt*,

> The Christians then entered the mosque with wine in hand. They intended to pull down a number of mosques in case the reign of the Tartars continued for some time more. Scholars, judges, and other Muslim notables repaired to the citadel of the Tartar governor, Ibil Siyān, to make a complaint about the excesses of the Christians, but he turned them out. Ibil Siyān gave audience to the Christians, however. To Allāh indeed do we belong and to Him shall we return.[4]

1 Madīna Munawwara.
2 Sa'dī, *Qaṣā'id wa Dīwān*, 56–57.
3 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 13:219–20.
4 Ibid., 8:219–20.

After the fall of Syria, the Mongols wanted to carry their arms to Egypt, which was the only Muslim country still out of their reach. The sultan of Egypt, Al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Sayf al-Dīn Quṭuz, knew that his country would be the Mongols' next target, and that it would be difficult to hold those savages off if they were allowed to make adequate preparations for invading his lands.

He therefore decided to attack the Mongols in Syria before they were able to consolidate their power. The forces of Egypt accordingly met the Mongols at ʿAyn Jālūt, a town below Nazareth in Palestine, on 25 Ramaḍān 658 (3 September 1260), under the command of Baybars, who afterward became the sovereign of Egypt. Unlike at previous battles, the Muslims met the Mongols in hotly contested combat and drove back the stream of savage hordes. The Egyptians pursued the defeated Mongols, slaughtering and capturing a large number of them, eastward beyond the Euphrates. Suyūṭī writes in *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*:

> The Muslims were victorious, by the grace of Allāh, and they inflicted a grievous defeat on the Tartars. A large number of Tartars were put to the sword. The retreating Tartars were so disheartened that people easily caught hold of them and despoiled them of their possessions."[1]

Sultan Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars defeated the Tartars in many a fierce battles after the battle of ʿAyn Jālūt and thus disproved the proverb that the Tartars were invincible.

Mongol Conversion

Islam was about to be submerged in a ferocious whirlpool of Mongol slaughter and destruction that threatened to wipe it out of existence, of which several Muslim writers had expressed fear. But Islam suddenly began to capture the hearts of the savage Tartars. The preachers of Islam thus accomplished a task that the sword-arm of the faith had failed to perform, by carrying the message of Islam to the barbaric hordes of heathen Mongols.

The Mongol conversion to Islam was indeed one of the few unpredictable events of history. The Tartar wave of conquest that had swept away the entire Islamic east within a short period of one year was, in truth, not so astounding as the Mongol acceptance of Islam during the zenith of their glory; for the Muslims had by the beginning of the seventh century of the Muslim era imbibed all those vices that are the natural outcome of opulence, luxury, and

1 Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, 191.

fast living. The Mongols were, on the other hand, a wild and ferocious, yet vigorous and sturdy, race who could have hardly been expected to submit to the spiritual and cultural superiority of a people who were so completely subdued, so disdained and despised, by them. The author of the *Preaching of Islam*, T. W. Arnold, expresses his amazement at this unbelievable feat:

> But Islam was to rise again from the ashes of its former grandeur and through its preachers win over these savage conquerors to the acceptance of the faith. This was a task for the missionary energies of Islam that was rendered more difficult from the fact that there were two powerful competitors in the field. The spectacle of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam emulously striving to win the allegiance of the fierce conquerors that had set their feet on the necks of adherents of these great missionary religions, is one that is without parallel in the history of the world[1]. . .
>
> For Islam to enter into competition with such powerful rivals as Buddhism and Christianity were at that time, must have appeared a well-nigh hopeless undertaking. For the Muslims had suffered more from the storm of the Mongol invasions than the others. Those cities that had hitherto been the rallying points of spiritual organization and learning for Islam in Asia, had been for the most part laid in ashes: the theologians and pious doctors of the faith, either slain or carried away into captivity.[2] Among the Mongol rulers—usually so tolerant towards all religions—there were some who exhibited varying degrees of hatred toward the Muslim faith. Jingis Khān ordered all those who killed animals in the Muhammadan fashion to be put to death, and this ordinance was revived by Khubilāy Khān, who by offering rewards to informers set on foot a sharp persecution that lasted for seven years, as many poor persons took advantage of this ready means of gaining wealth, and slaves accused their masters, in order to gain their freedom.[3] During the reign of Kuyuk Khān (644–646/1246–1248), who left the conduct of affairs entirely to his two Christian ministers and whose court was filled with Christian monks, the Muhammadans were made to suffer great severities.

1 Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, p. 219.

2 So notoriously brutal was the treatment they received that even the Chinese showmen in their exhibitions of shadow figures exultingly brought forward the figure of an old man with a white beard dragged by the neck at the tail of a horse, as showing how the Mongol horsemen behaved toward the Musalmans (H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols*, 1:159).

3 This edict was only withdrawn when it was found that it prevented Muḥammadan merchants from visiting the court and that trade suffered in consequence (*History of the Mongols*, 1:112, 273; *Ṭabaqāt-i Naṣīrī*, 1146).

> Arghūn (683–690/1284–1291) the fourth Īlkhān persecuted the Musalmans and took away from them all posts in the departments of justice and finance, and forbade them to appear at his court.
>
> In spite of all difficulties however, the Mongols and the savage tribes that followed in their wake were at length brought to submit to the faith of those Muslim peoples whom they had crushed beneath their feet.[1]

As unbelievable and of far-reaching significance as the Mongol conversion to Islam may have been, it is also not less surprising that extremely few and scant records of this glorious achievement are to be found in the history of the time. The names of only a few dedicated saviors of Islam who won converts from the savage hordes are known to the world, but their venture was no less daring, nor their achievement less significant, than the accomplishment of the warriors of the faith. Their memory shall always be enriched by the gratitude of Muslims, for they had, in reality, performed a great service to humanity in general and to the Muslims in particular, by disseminating knowledge of faith among those barbarians, winning them over to the service of One God and making them the standard-bearers of the apostle of peace.

After Genghis Khan's death, the great heritage of that Mongol conqueror was divided into four dominions headed by the offspring of his sons. The message of Islam had begun to spread among all these four sections of the Mongols, who were rapidly converted to the faith. Regarding the conversion of the ruling princes in the lineage of Batu, the son of Jochi, Genghis Khan's first-born, who ruled the western portion as khan of the Golden Horde, Arnold writes:

> The first Mongol ruling prince who professed Islam was Baraka Khān, who was chief of the Golden Horde from 654/1256 to 666/1267. He is said one day to have fallen in with a caravan coming from Bukhārā, and taking two of the merchants aside, to have questioned them on the doctrines of Islam, and they expounded to him their faith so persuasively that he became converted in all sincerity. He first revealed his change of faith to his youngest brother, whom he induced to follow his example, and then made open profession of his new belief. After his conversion, Baraka Khān entered into a close alliance with the Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt, Ruknu-d Dīn Baybars. The initiative came from the latter, who had given a hospitable reception to a body of troops, two hundred in number, belonging to the Golden Horde; these men, observing the

1 *The Preaching of Islam*, 225–227.

growing enmity between their Khān and Hūlāgū, the conqueror of Baghdād, in whose army they were serving, took flight into Syria, whence they were honorably conducted to Cairo to the court of Baybars, who persuaded them to embrace Islam.[1] Baybars himself was at war with Hūlāgū, whom he had recently defeated and driven out of Syria. He sent two of the Mongol fugitives, with some other envoys, to bear a letter to Baraka Khān. On their return these envoys reported that each princess and *amīr* at the court of Baraka Khān had an *imām* and a *mu'adhdhin* and the children were taught the Qur'ān in the schools.[2] These friendly relations between Baybars and Baraka Khān brought many of the Mongols of the Golden Horde into Egypt,[3] where they were prevailed upon to become Musalmans.[4]

Hūlāgū had founded the dynasty of Īlkhāns in Iran, to which he had later added a great part of Asia Minor. Arnold relates the conversion of this branch of Genghis Khan's progeny in these words:

In Persia, where Hūlāgū founded the dynasty of the Īlkhāns, the progress of Islam among the Mongols was much slower. In order to strengthen himself against the attacks of Baraka Khān and the Sultan of Egypt, Hūlāgū accepted the alliance of the Christian powers of the East, such as the king of Armenia and the Crusaders. His favorite wife was a Christian who favorably disposed the mind of her husband toward her co-religionists, and his son Abāgā Khān married the daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople. . . . His brother Tokūdār, who succeeded him, was the first of the Īlkhāns who embraced Islam.[5] He had been brought up as a Christian, for (as a contemporary Christian writer tells us), "he was baptized when young and called by the name of Nicholas. But when he was grown up, through his intercourse with Saracens, of whom he was very fond, he became a base Saracen, and, renouncing the Christian faith, wished to be called Muḥammad Khān, and strove with all his might that the Tartars should be converted to the faith and sect of Muḥammad, and when they proved obstinate, not daring to force them, he brought about their conversion by giving them honours and favours and gifts, so that in his time many Tartars were converted to the faith of the Saracens." This prince sent the news of his conversion to the Sultan of Egypt in the following letter:—"By the

1 Cf., Maqrīzī, *Histoire des Sultans*, 1:180–81.
2 Ibid., 1:215.
3 Ibid.
4 *The Preaching of Islam*, 227–29.
5 He was called Aḥmad after his conversion.

power of God Almighty, the mandate of Aḥmad to the Sultan of Egypt. God Almighty (praised be his name!) by His grace preventing us and by the light of His guidance, has guided us in our early youth and vigor into the true path of the knowledge of His deity and the confession of His unity, to bear witness that Muḥammad (on whom rest the highest blessings!) is the Prophet of God, and to reverence His saints and His pious servants. 'Whom God shall please to guide, that man's breast will He open to Islam' [Q 6:125]. We ceased not to incline our heart to the promotion of the faith and the improvement of the condition of Islam and the Muslims, up to the time when the succession to the empire came to us from our illustrious father and brother, and God spread over us the glory of His grace and kindness, so that in the abundance of His favours our hopes were realized, and He revealed to us the bride of the kingdom, and she was brought forth to us a noble spouse. A Kūrīltāī or general assembly was convened, wherein our brothers, our sons, great nobles, generals of the army and captains of the forces, met to hold council; and they were all agreed on carrying out the order of our elder brother, viz. to summon here a vast levy of our troops whose numbers would make the earth, despite its vastness, appear too narrow, whose fury and fierce onset would fill the hearts of men with fear, being animated with a courage before which the mountain peaks bow down, and a firm purpose that makes the hardest rocks grow soft. We reflected on this their resolution which expressed the wish of all, and we concluded that it ran counter to the aim we had in view—to promote the common weal, i.e. to strengthen the ordinance of Islam; never, as far as lies in our power, to issue any order that will not tend to prevent bloodshed, remove the ills of men, and cause the breeze of peace and prosperity to blow on all lands, and the kings of other countries to rest upon the couch of affection and benevolence, whereby the commands of God will be honoured and mercy be shown to the people of God. Herein, God inspired us to quench this fire and put an end to these terrible calamities, and make known to those who advanced this proposal (of a levy) what it is that God has put into our hearts to do, namely, to employ all possible means for the healing of all the sickness of the world, and putting off what should only be appealed to as the last remedy. For we desire not to hasten to appeal to arms, until we have first declared the right path, and will permit it only after setting forth the truth and establishing it with proofs. Our resolve to carry out whatever appears to us good and advantageous has been strengthened by the counsels of the Shaykhu-l Islām, the model of divines, who has given us much assistance in religious matters. We have appointed our chief justice, Qutbu-d Dīn and the Atābak, Bahāu-d Dīn, both trustworthy

persons of this flourishing kingdom, to make known to you our course of action and bear witness to our good intentions for the common weal of the Muslims; and to make it known that God has enlightened us, and that Islam annuls all that has gone before it, and that God Almighty has put it into our hearts to follow the truth and those who practice it. . . . If some convincing proof be required, let men observe our actions. By the grace of God, we have raised aloft the standards of the faith, and borne witness to it in all our orders and our practice, so that the ordinances of the law of Muḥammad may be brought to the fore and firmly established in accordance with the principles of justice laid down by Aḥmad. Whereby we have filled the hearts of the people with joy, have granted free pardon to all offenders, and shown them indulgences, saying, 'May God pardon the past!' We have reformed all matters concerning the pious endowments of Muslims given for mosques, colleges, charitable institutions, and the rebuilding of caravanserais: we have restored their incomes to those to whom they were due according to the terms laid down by the donors. . . . We have ordered the pilgrims to be treated with respect, provision to be made for their caravans and for securing their safety on the pilgrim routes; we have given perfect freedom to merchants, travelling from one country to another, that they may go wherever they please: and we have strictly prohibited our soldiers and police from interfering with them in their comings or goings. He seeks the alliance of the Sultan of Egypt "so that these countries and cities may again be populated, these terrible calamities be put down, the sword be returned to the scabbard; that all peoples may dwell in peace and quietness, and the necks of the Muslims be freed from the ills of humiliation and disgrace."

To the student of the history of the Mongols it is a relief to pass from the recital of nameless horrors and continual bloodshed to a document emanating from a Mongol prince, that gives expression to such humane and benevolent sentiments, which sound strange indeed coming from such lips. . . .

A revolt broke out against him [Aḥmad Tokūdār], headed by his nephew Arghūn, who compassed his death and succeeded him on the throne. During his brief reign (683–690/1284–1291), the Christians were once more restored to favor, while the Musalmans had to suffer persecution in their turn and were dismissed from their posts and driven away from the court.

The successors of Tokūdār were all heathen, until, in 657/1295, Ghāzān, the seventh and greatest of the Īlkhāns, became a Musalman and made Islam the ruling religion of Persia. . . .

Ghāzān himself before his conversion had been brought up as a Buddhist

> and had erected several Buddhist temples in Khurāsān and took great pleasure in the company of the priests of this faith, who had come into Persia in large numbers since the establishment of the Mongol supremacy over that country. He appears to have been naturally of a religious turn of mind, for he studied the creeds of the different religions of his time, and used to hold discussions with the learned doctors of each faith. Rashīdu-d Dīn, his learned minister and the historian of his reign, was therefore probably correct in maintaining the genuineness of his conversion to Islam, the religious observances of which he zealously kept throughout his whole reign, though his contemporaries (and later writers have often re-echoed the imputation) represented him as having only yielded to the solicitations of some Amīrs and Shaykhs.[1]

Ibn Kathīr also relates, in the chronicle for the year 694/1295 that Ghāzān embraced Islam during that year. The accounts left by other historians show that the conversion of Ghāzān was brought about by a pious Turk, Amīr Tūzūn[2] by name. Ibn Kathīr's version is as follows:

> In this year the great-grandson of Genghis Khan, Ghazan, son of Arghun, son of Abaqa, son of Tolui, son of Genghis Khan, announced his conversion to the faith of Islam, along with all or a majority of the Tartars under him, through the persuasion of Amīr Tūzūn (on whom may rest the peace of Allāh Almighty). Pearls, gold, and silver balls were showered upon those who declared their allegiance to Islam. The king took the name Maḥmūd and attended Friday services; he demolished a number of heathen temples and churches and levied a protection-tax on them; and he returned goods and property confiscated from Baghdad and other Muslim cities. Prayer beads were seen in the hands of Tartars, for which act of benevolence the people thanked Allāh Almighty.[3]

Continuing the account relating to Islamization of the Mongol kingdom in Persia, Arnold writes:

> His brother, who succeeded him in 704/1304, under the name of Muḥammad Khudābandah, had been brought up as a Christian in the faith of his mother and had been baptized under the name of Nicholas, but after his mother's death, while he was still a young man, he became a convert to Islam through the persuasions of his wife. Ibn Baṭūṭah says that his example exercised a

1 *The Preaching of Islam*, 229–33.

2 Arnold and certain other historians have given his name as Nawrūz Beg.

3 *Al-Bidāya wa 'l-Nihāya*, 13:340.

great influence on the Mongols. From this time forward Islam became the paramount faith in the kingdom of the Īlkhāns.[1]

Coming to the story of the spread of Islam in the Middle Kingdom of the Mongols, Arnold says:

> The details that we possess of the progress of Islam in the Middle Kingdom, which fell to the lot of Jagatāy and his descendants, are still more meagre. The first of this line who "had the blessedness of receiving the light of the faith" was Burāq Khān (a great grandson of Jagatāy), who embraced Islam two years after his accession to the throne and took the name of Ghiyās al-Dīn (665–669/1266–1270). But at first the success of Islam was short-lived, for after the death of this prince, those who had been converted during his reign relapsed into their former heathenism; and it was not until the next century that the conversion of Ṭarmashīrīn Khān (722–731/1322–1330) caused Islam to be at all generally adopted by the Jagatāy Mongols, who when they followed the example of their chief this time remained true to their new faith. But even now the ascendancy of Islam was not assured, for his successor persecuted the Muslims, and it was not until some years later that we hear of the first Musalman king of Kashgar, which the break-up of the Jagatāy dynasty had erected into a separate kingdom. This prince, Tūqluq Tīmūr Khān (748–764/1347–1363), is said to have owed his conversion to a holy man from Bukhārā, by name Shaykh Jamālu-d Dīn. This Shaykh in company with a number of travelers had unwittingly trespassed on the game-preserves of the prince, who ordered them to be bound hand and foot and brought before him. In reply to his angry question, how they had dared interfere with his hunting, the Shaykh pleaded that they were strangers and were quite unaware that they were trespassing on forbidden ground. Learning that they were Persians, the prince said that a dog was worth more than a Persian. "Yes," replied the Shaykh, "if we had not the true faith, we should indeed be worse than the dogs." Struck with his reply, the Khān ordered this bold Persian to be brought before him on his return from hunting, and taking him aside asked him to explain what he meant by these words and what was "faith." The Shaykh then set before him the glorious doctrines of Islam with such fervour and zeal that the heart of the Khān that before had been hard as a stone was melted like wax, and so terrible a picture did the holy man draw of the state of unbelief, that the prince was convinced of the blindness of his own errors, but said, "Were I

1 *The Preaching of Islam*, 234.

> now to make profession of the faith of Islam, I should not be able to lead my subjects into the true path. But bear with me a little; and when I have entered into the possession of the kingdom of my forefathers, come to me again." For the empire of Jagatāy had by this time been broken up into a number of petty princedoms, and it was many years before Tūqluq Tīmūr succeeded in uniting under his sway the whole empire as before. Meanwhile Shaykh Jamālu-d Dīn had returned to his home, where he fell dangerously ill: when at the point of death, he said to his son Rashīdu-d Dīn, "Tūqluq Tīmūr will one day become a great monarch; fail not to go and salute him in my name and fearlessly remind him of the promise he made me." Some years later, when Tūqluq Tīmūr had re-won the empire of his fathers, Rashīdu-d Dīn made his way to the camp of the Khān to fulfill the last wishes of his father, but in spite of all his efforts he could not gain an audience of the Khān. At length he devised the following expedient: one day in the early morning, he began to chant the call to prayers, close to the Khān's tent. Enraged at having his slumbers disturbed in this way, the prince ordered him to be brought into his presence, whereupon Rashīdu-d Dīn delivered his father's message. Tūqluq Khān was not unmindful of his promise, and repeating the profession of faith, declared himself a Muslim, and afterwards used his influence to spread Islam among his people. From that time forth Islam became the established faith in the countries under the rule of the descendants of Jagatāy.[1]

Certain Turkish historians have related the story of Tughluq Timur's conversion in greater detail and reported the dialogue verbatim between him and Jamāl al-Dīn. Tughluq Timur had enquired, pointing out toward his dog, whether he (Jamāl al-Dīn) was better than the beast. Jamāl al-Dīn calmly replied, "If I pass away from this world with my faith intact, I would be better than the dog; if not, the dog would be better than me." Taken aback by the reply, Tughluq Timur asked what he meant by "faith." And thus he was eventually led to embrace Islam, as Arnold relates. It is thus certain that a word uttered by Jamāl al-Dīn in all sincerity was the ultimate cause of the conversion of Tughluq Timur and of the spread of Islam in his realm, a feat that could perhaps not have been accomplished by a thousand speeches or the might of arms.

Turning to the spread of Islam among that branch of the Golden Horde, which was succeeded by Ogodei, the third son of Genghis Khan, and under which Kubilai Khan later brought the whole of China, Arnold says:

1 Ibid., 234–36.

> Scattered up and down throughout the length and breadth of the Mongol empire, there must have been many of the followers of the Prophet who labored unsuccessfully and unknown, to win unbelievers to the faith. In the reign of Ogotāy Khān (626–639/1229–1241), we read of a certain Buddhist governor of Persia, named Kurguz, who in his later years abjured Buddhism and became a Musalman. In the reign of Tīmūr Khān (723–728/1323–1328), Ananda, a grandson of Khubilāy Khān and viceroy of Kansuh, was a zealous Musalman and had converted great many persons in Tangut and won over a large number of the troops under his command to the same faith. He was summoned to court and efforts were made to induce him to conform to Buddhism, and on his refusing to abandon his faith he was cast into prison. But he was shortly after set at liberty, for fear of an insurrection among the inhabitants of the Tangut, who were much attached to him.[1]

In this way Islam won over, in a short time, its most inveterate enemy, who had trampled underfoot the entire Islamic world, and whose onslaught, for a time, no Muslim power was able to withstand. Islam again proved that it possessed an irresistible charm that can captivate the hearts of its bitterest foe. The Mongols, after accepting the faith of Islam, produced a large number of scholars, theologian, and jurists of faith as well as those who fought for the cause of Allāh, and served to defend Islam on many a critical occasion. Iqbāl has rightly said:

> Manifest it is from the story of the Tartar hordes' mischief,
> That defenders of the Kaʿba were found from heathen brutes.[2]

1 Ibid., 227.

2 Iqbāl, *Bāng-i Darā*, 230.

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Index

A
Abbasids 62, 64, 65, 67, 170
  Hārūn al-Rashīd 65, 66, 78
  Ma'mūn al-Rashīd 78, 84, 86
  Muqtadī bi-'Llāh 102, 116
  Muqtafī li-Amri 'Llāh 170, 176
  Mustaḍī' 247
  Mustanjid bi-'Llāh 170
  Mustanṣir bi-'Llāh 247
  Mustarshid bi-'Llāh 169
  Mustaẓhir bi-'Llāh 116, 169
  Musta'ṣim bi-'Llāh 89, 247, 248
  Mutawakkil 84, 85, 93
  Mu'taṣim bi-'Llāh 73, 83, 84, 87
  Rāshid bi-'Llāh 170
  Saffāḥ 187
  Wāthiq 84
'Abd al-Raḥman ibn al-Qāsim 75
'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Isḥāq 89
'Abdullāh al-Maḥḍ 37
'Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak 66, 135
'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr 37
'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd 140
'Abdullāh ibn Wahab 75
'Abdullāh ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 75
Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq 91
Abū Bakr ibn al-Ṣayrafī 99
Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh 80
Abū Dawūd al-Sijistanī 74
Abū Ḥanīfa (Imām) 63, 74, 75, 133
Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī 70
Abū 'l-Wafā' Yaḥyā 176
Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī 118
Abū Yūsuf (Imām) 75, 80
Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', 56
Acre 217, 222, 223
'Āḍid li-Dīni 'Llāh 225
Africa 50
Ahl al-Bayt 112
Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l-Jamā'a 219
Aḥmad Abū 'l-'Abbās 247
Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (Imām) 18, 74, 76, 87, 133, 199
Aḥmad ibn 'Alī 101
Aleppo 230
Alexandria 206
'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn 36
'Alī ibn al-Madīnī 91
Allāh 45, 77, 171, 231, 240
Almohads 159
Alp Arslan 102
al-Āmidī, Sayf al-Dīn 229
Āmir bi-Aḥkāmi 'Llāh 225
'Amra bint 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Anṣāriyya 43
'Amr al-Kaysānī 166
Andalusia 70
Aqsa Mosque 15
Arab 35, 106
'Ārim Abū Nu'mān 83
Aristotelian school 106
Aristotle 106, 124
Armageddon 17
Arnold, T.W. 264, 266
  on Mongols' conversion 259, 260, 261

on spread of Islam 265
Ascension 39
asceticism 116, 143
Ashhab ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 75
al-Ashʿarī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 18, 105
al-Ashʿarī, Bilāl ibn Abī Burda ibn Abī Mūsā 101
Ashʿarīs 102, 105, 153, 154
ʿĀṣim ibn ʿAlī 73
Atābeks 226
ʿAwwām ibn Ḥawshab 59
ʿAyn Jālūt, battle of 258
Ayyūbids 246

B
Baghdad 15, 67, 73, 162, 207
al-Baghdādī, Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid 165
al-Baghdādī, Aḥmad al-Qaṭṭān 82
Baha'ism 111
Bahāu-d Dīn 262
al-Bāhilī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 97
al-Balādhurī 49
Balian of Ibelin 215
Banias, siege of 210
al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr 96, 102, 153
al-Bāqillānī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan 163
Barbarossa, Frederick 216
Basra 56, 60, 61, 62
Bāṭinīs 108, 109, 111, 112, 126, 200, 226, 246
Baybars, Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir (Ruknu-d Dīn) 237, 240, 258, 260
bayʿa (pledge) 179
Berber tribes 49
al-Birzālī, Abū ʿAbdillāh 164
Bishr al-Ḥāfī 67, 187, 194, 199
Bishr ibn al-Ḥārith 141
Bishr ibn al-Walīd 87
al-Bisṭāmī, Bāyazīd 118, 195
Black Stone 36
Bohemond, Prince of Antioch 206
Buddhism 267
Bukhārā 251, 265
Bukhārī (Imām) 70, 72, 73, 157
Bundār ibn al-Ḥusayn 101
Burgundy, Duke of 216
al-Buwayṭī, Yūsuf ibn Yaḥyā 76
Byzantine 39, 68, 245

C
Cairo 236, 261
Calamar, Duke of 206
Christendom 203, 216, 217, 245
Christians 205, 213, 232, 235, 256, 257, 263
Constantinople (Emperor of) 261
Crusaders 203, 206, 209, 211, 212, 235, 244

D
al-Dabbās, Abū 'l-Khayr Ḥammād ibn Muslim 163
Ḍaḥḥāk ibn ʿAbd al-Rahmān 44
Damascus 62, 230, 232. 257
Damietta 206
al-Dawraqī, Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm 91
demonic insinuation 167
Dhahabī 230
on Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal 81, 83
on Ashʿarī 100
Divine Being 171
Divine Intuition 167
Divine Oneness 172
Divine Revelation 109
Dome of the Rock 15
Druze tribes 226

E
Edessa 205
Egypt 225, 244
Europe 203, 205, 216

F
Fā'iz bi-Naṣri 'Llāh 225
al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr 106
Farazdaq (poet) 36
al-Fārisī, ʿAbd al-Ghāfir 116, 127
al-Fārmadī, Abū ʿAlī 158
al-Fārūq. *See* ʿUMAR IBN AL-KHAṬṬĀB
Fāṭimids 224, 225, 226, 227
Āmir bi-Aḥkāmi 'Llāh 225

Fā'iz bi-Naṣri 'Llāh 225
Ḥākim bi-'Llāh 227
Mustanṣir bi-'Llāh 225
Ẓāhir li-Iʿzāz Dīni 'Llāh 225
ʿĀḍid li-Dīni 'Llāh 225
al-Firabrī, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf 73
al-Firyābī, Abū Bakr Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad 73
Flanders, Count of 216
Franks 209, 216

G
al-Gāzarūnī, Muḥammad 127
al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid 18, 56, 200
Ghāzān Khān 263, 264
Ghiyās al-Dīn. *See* BURĀQ KHĀN
Ghorids 245, 249
Gibbon, Edward 254
Golden Horde 260, 266
Greek metaphysics 98, 106
Greek mythology 112
Greek philosophy 106, 108, 112, 123, 152

H
ḥadīth masters 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74
ḥadīths 69, 70, 73, 80
ḥadīth scholars 42, 80, 86, 93, 97, 140, 198
ḥajj 40
Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf 56, 60
Ḥākim bi-'Llāh 227
Ḥallāj 200
Ḥanafī 63, 102
Ḥanbal ibn Hilāl 79
Ḥanbalīs 93, 97, 98, 162, 189
al-Harawī, Abū 'l-Ḥusayn 101
Ḥārim 206, 209
al-Ḥarīrī, Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim 161
Hārūn al-Rashīd 65, 66, 78
Ḥasan al-Baṣrī 18, 51, 199
Ḥasan al-Muthannā 37
Ḥasan ibn Qaḥṭaba 63
Ḥasan ibn Sahl 66
Hattin, battle of 212
Haytham ibn Bashīr 80
Hellenistic philosophy 105, 107
Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 63
Ḥiṣn al-Akrād 209
Historians 81
Hūlāgū 255, 261
Humphrey of Toron 212
Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī 37
hypocrites 61

I
Ibn Abī Dāwūd 78, 87, 88
Ibn al-Ashʿath 59
Ibn al-Athīr 247
on Caliph Mustaḍī' 247
on Nūr al-Dīn Zangī's character 207
on violence of the Mongols 252
Ibn al-Dīnī, Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb (on profile of Ibn al-Jawzī) 186
Ibn al-Fārisī (on piety of Ibn al-Jawzī) 185
Ibn al-Ḥājib, Jamāl al-Dīn 230
Ibn al-Humām, ʿAbd al-Razzāq 80
Ibn al-Jawzī 19, 162
criticism of Ghazālī 152
on Bāṭinīs 112
on Ghazālī's death 157
on his childhood 183
on *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* 127
on Nūr al-Dīn Zangī's character 207
Ibn al-Khafīf, Abū ʿAbdillāh 96
Ibn al-Muqannaʿ 200
Ibn al-Najjār
on piety of Ibn al-Jawzī 185
on ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī 165
Ibn al-Qayyim 226
Ibn al-Subkī 235, 238, 240
Ibn al-ʿAlqamī 247
Ibn al-ʿArabī, Abū Bakr 158
Ibn Baṭūṭa 264
Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd 229
Ibn Ḥazm, Abū Bakr 40, 43
Ibn Jamāʿa, Badr al-Dīn 238
Ibn Kathīr 244, 246
on atrocities of the Mongols 255
on Caliph Mustarshid's defeat 170
on capture of Damascus 257

on conversion of Ghāzān 264
on ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī 176
Ibn Khaldūn 159
Ibn Khallikān
on Ashʿarī's works 100
on character of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 221
on Imām al-Ḥaramayn 103
on Nūr al-Dīn Zangī's character 207
Ibn Mahdī, ʿAbd al-Rahmān 80
Ibn Māja, Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad 74
Ibn Maʿīn, Yaḥyā 80, 83
Ibn Qudāma 76
Ibn Qurra Arsalān 221
Ibn Qutayba 91
Ibn Rushd 126
Ibn Shaddād 211
on death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 218
on execution of the Reginald 213
on faith of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 219
on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's courage 223
on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's enthusiasm for Jihād 211
Ibn Sīnā 106, 227
Ibn Sīrīn, Muḥammad 54
Ibn Tāshfīn, ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf 159
Ibn Taymiyya 126
on Ibn al-Jawzī's writings 184
on *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* 152
on ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī 166
Ibn Tūmārt, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdullāh 159
Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, ʿIzz al-Dīn 19
on ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī 165
Ibn ʿAqīl, Abū 'l-Wafā' 161, 163
Ibn ʿAsākir 229
on Ghazālī's last days 157
Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī 84
Ibrāhīm ibn Adham 199
Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī 87
Ibrāhīm ibn Muṣʿab 90
Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbdillāh 64
Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn (Ghazālī) 127, 139, 148, 153, 200
Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' 107
Ilkhāns 261, 263, 265
Imām al-Ḥaramayn. *See* AL-JUWAYNĪ
Imām Ashʿarī. *See* ABŪ 'L-ḤASAN AL-ASHʿARĪ
Imāmīs 225
Inaljuk 251
India 49
Iqbāl (ʿAllāma) 267
Iran 246
al-ʿIrāqī, Zayn al-Dīn 127, 153
Isfahan 112
al-Isfarāyīnī, Abū Isḥāq 96, 102
Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm 84, 86
Islam 50, 81, 127, 204, 257, 264
traitors of 111
Islamic law. *See* SHARĪʿA
Islamic legal system 76
Islamic theology 126
al-Ismāʿīlī, Abū Bakr 100
al-Ismāʿīlī, Abū 'l-Naṣr 115
Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbdillāh ibn Abī 'l-Mahājir Mawlā Banī Makhzūm 49
Ismāʿīlīs 225, 226, 227

J
Jagatāy 265
Jamāl al-Dīn 266
Jarīr ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd 80
Jerusalem 206, 214
Jews 204
jihād 19, 211
al-Jīlānī, ʿAbd al-Qādir 162
Jingis Khān. *See* GENGHIS KHAN
Joscelin III, Count of Edessa 206
Joscelin of Courtenay 212
al-Jubbā'ī, Abū ʿAlī 94
al-Jubbā'ī, ʿAbdullāh ibn Abī 'l-Ḥasan 166
Junayd al-Baghdādī 67
jurisprudence 55, 81, 91, 161, 162
jurists 132
The Four Jurists 74, 75, 76
al-Jurjānī, ʿAbd al-Qāhir 161
al-Juwaynī, Abū 'l-Maʿālī (Imām al-Ḥaramayn) 102, 115, 127, 200
death of 103

K
al-Kajjī, Abū Muslim 73
kalif. *See* CALIPH
Karak 233
Karbala 63
al-Karkhī, Maʿrūf 67, 187, 199
Kashgar 265
al-Khallāl, Abū Bakr 75
Khān, Abāgā 261
Khān, Ananda 267
Khān, Baraka 260, 261
Khān, Burāq 265
Khan, Genghis 243, 250, 254, 260
Khān, Kubilai 254, 266
Khān, Kuyuk 259
Khān, Ogotāy 267
Khān, Ṭarmashīrīn 265
Khān, Tūqluq Tīmūr 265, 266, 267
al-Khaṭṭābī, Abū Sulayman 240
al-Khazrajī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 248
Khubilāy Khān. *See* KUBILAI KHAN
Khudābandah, Muḥammad 264
Khurasan 50
al-Khurāsānī, Abū Muslim 186
al-Khuttulī, Aḥmad ibn Jaʿfar 73
Khwarizm 249, 250
Khwārizm Shāh, Muḥammad 249, 250
al-Kindī, Yaʿqūb 106
Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt (Ibn al-Jawzī) 189
Kufa 56, 64

L
Lamb, Harold 249
  on impact of Genghis Khan 254
  on Khwārizm Shāh's foolishness 251
Lane-Poole, Stanley
  on benevolence of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 215
  on dissension of the Muslim East 205
  on end of the Third Crusade 216
  on Nūr al-Dīn Zangī 206
  on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's youth 224
  on transformation of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 211
  on Muslim victory at Hattin 212
  on youth of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 210
  on ʿImād al-Dīn Zangī 205
al-Laythī, Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā 75
Leopold of Austria 216
lexicography 161
literature 161

M
Madīna 40, 64
Madrasa Mustanṣiriyya 246
Madrasa Ṣāliḥiyya 234
maghrib 49
al-Makhramī, Abū Saʿīd 163
Al-Malik al-Afḍal 244
Al-Malik al-Ashraf 230, 232
Al-Malik al-Kāmil 230, 231
Al-Malik al-Manṣūr 233
Al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Sayf al-Dīn Quṭuz 258
Al-Malik al-Muʿaẓẓam Tūrān Shāh 237
Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb 234, 237
Al-Malik al-ʿĀdil 215, 230, 244
Mālik ibn Anas (Imām) 74, 133
  disciples of 75
Mālik ibn Dīnār 192
Malikshāh 102, 103, 115, 137, 138, 205
Ma'mūn al-Rashīd 65, 78, 84, 86, 87
Mansoura 235
Manṣūr ibn Ghālib 47
al-Maqdisī, Abū Shāma 226, 230
al-Maqrīzī (Historian) 224, 225
al-Marrūdhī 83, 84, 86
Marwān 37
Mary, Cathedral 257
al-Māturīdī, Abū Manṣūr 101, 102
Memluk. *See* MAMLUKS
metaphysics 77, 124
  conflict with religion 118
  Greek 98
Mohammedans 204
Mohammed Shah of Kharesm. *See* KHWĀRIZM SHĀH
Mongols 235, 246, 248, 250
  conversion of 258, 260, 261, 264, 267
  invasion by 252, 253
Moors 250

Mosque of Omar 204
Mosque of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ 234
Muḍar 46
Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (Imām) 75
Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Abī Samīna 90
Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Athīr al-Dīn Ibn Ḥayyān 70
Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Maḥḍ 63
Muḥammad ﷺ (Prophet) 69
al-Muḥāsibī, Ḥārith 118
Mujīr al-Dīn 138
Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl (Ghazālī) 116
Muqtadī bi-'Llāh 102, 116
Muqtafī li-Amri 'Llāh 170, 176
al-Murādī, Rabīʿ ibn Sulaymān 76
Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj (Imām) 73, 157
Muslims 212, 231, 244, 257, 258
  decline of their power 204
  massacre in Jerusalem 204
Mustaḍī' 247
Mustanjid bi-'Llāh 170
Mustanṣir bi-'Llāh 225, 247
al-Mustanṣirī, Mujāhid al-Dīn Aybak al-Duwaydār 245
Mustarshid bi-'Llāh 169
Mustaẓhir bi-'Llāh 116, 169
Mustaʿṣim bi-'Llāh 237, 247, 248
Mutanabbī (poet) 187
Mutawakkil 84, 85, 93
Muwaffaq ʿAbd al-Laṭīf
  on character of Ibn al-Jawzī 186
al-Muzanī, Ismāʿīl ibn Yaḥyā 76
Muʿādh ibn Muʿādh 71
Muʿtaṣim bi-'Llāh 73, 83, 84, 87, 89, 93
Muʿtazilīs 86, 87, 96, 97, 98, 102, 154
  disservice to Islam 108
Muʿtazilism 93
mysticism 118, 158, 163
mystics 140, 153, 160, 180, 192

N
nabīdh 43
Nadwī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī 15, 20
  awards 22
  character 25
  death 24
  funeral 25
  teachers 21
  works 21
al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, Muḥammad 63, 64
al-Nasā'ī, Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān 74
Nāṣir li-Dīni 'Llāh. *See* ABBASID CALIPH MUSTAḌĪ'
Nile 244
Nishapur 102, 103
Niẓāmiyya College 115
Nur-ed-din. *See* ZANGĪ, NŪR AL-DĪN
Nuṣayrīs 226

O
Ogodei. *See* OGOTĀY KHĀN
orthodox 229
orthodox school 93, 98, 105, 189, 226

P
paganism 35, 60
Palestine 206, 216
partisanship 35
Persia 39, 264
Peter the Hermit 203
Philip Augustus 216
philosophers 120, 160
philosophy 108, 117, 123, 124, 126
  denigration of 126
  ethical 143
piety 37
Plato 124
poor-due. *See zakāt*
Potiphar 197
pre-Islamic ignorance 36, 44, 60
protection-tax (*jizya*) 41, 48, 50, 135
public treasury 39, 65
purification of the heart 118, 120, 127, 148

Q
Qadianism 111
Qāḍī Fāḍil 219
Qādirīs 180

al-Qarmaṭī, Abū Saʿīd al-Jannābī 200
Qarmaṭīs 102
Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr 37, 43
Qatāda al-Ḥusaynī 245
al-Qawārīrī, ʿUbaydullāh ibn ʿUmar 87
qibla 214
Qur'ān 55, 86

R
Rabīʿ ibn Anas 55
racial pride 35
al-Rādhakānī, Aḥmad 115
Rāfiḍī Shī'ites 102, 226
Rajā' ibn Ḥaywa 38
Ramla 216, 220
Raqqa 66, 87, 90
al-Raqqī, Abū 'l-ʿAbbās 90
Rāshid bi-'Llāh 170
Rashīdu-d Dīn 264, 266
al-Rawāsī, ʿAmr ibn Abī 'l-Ḥasan 157
Raymond III, Count of Tripoli 206
Reginald of Châtillon 204, 212, 213
religious scholars 42, 230
  importance of 129, 132
religious sciences 43, 161
revenues 178
Richard the Lionhearted 216
righteous disposition 39
Rightly-Guided Caliphs 35, 38
Roman Laws 68

S
Saffāḥ 187
al-Sajjāda, Ḥasan ibn Ḥammāḍ 87
Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī 19, 218, 226, 229
Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ghanī ibn Fākhir Fīrāsh 245
Ṣāliḥ ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal 85
Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl 232, 233
Sālim al-Ḥusaynī 245
Sālim ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar 37
Samarkand 101
Sanjar 137
Saracen Prisoners 204
Saracens 215, 261
Sarakhsh 79
Satan 202
Saʿdī (poet) 256
Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab 37
Saʿīd ibn Jubayr 54
Sana'a 81
scholastic theology 96
self-purification 158
Seljuq 249
  Empire 116
  Kings 138, 170
Seljuq sultans
  Alp Arslan 102
  Malikshāh 102, 103, 115, 137, 205
  Masʿūd 170
  Muḥammad 155
  Sanjar 137
al-Shādhilī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 238
Shāfiʿī scholars 102
al-Shāfiʿī, Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān 88
al-Shāfiʿī, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs (Imām) 74, 80, 81, 88, 133
  disciples of 76
Shāh Waliyyullāh 240
Sharaf al-Dīn ʿIsā
  on ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī's death 181
Sharīf al-Raḍī (poet) 186
Sharīʿa 246
Shaʿbī, 54
Shiblī Nuʿmānī 127, 143
  on Ghazālī's endeavors in Spain 158
Shī'ites 225, 229, 248
al-Shīrāzī, Abū Isḥāq 102, 161
Socrates 124
Spain 159
Spartan 211
spiritual excellence 36, 180
state treasury 35, 39, 50
St. Lazarus 215
al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn
  on barbarous acts of the Mongols 255
Sufyān al-Thawrī 67, 133, 199
al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā 220
Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 38, 39, 40

Sunna 68
Sunnīs 248
Suyūṭī 238, 258
  on battle of ʿAyn Jālūt 258
Syria 258

T
al-Ṭabrasī al-Ẓāhirī, ʿAlā al-Dīn 245
al-Tabrīzī, Abū Zakariyyā 161, 163
Tahāfut al-Falāsifa (Ghazālī) 124
Tāj al-Dīn 238
al-Tammār, Abū 'l-Naṣr 141
Tangut 267
Taqī al-Dīn 221
Tarsus 87
Tartars 231, 232, 252
Tawḥīd 14
al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān 55
Thābit ibn Qurra 55
theologians 94, 153
theology, polemical 134, 155
Third Crusade 216
Tiberias 212
Tokūdār 261, 263
Transoxiana 50
tribal alliances 44
tribal favoritism 35
Tughluq Timur. *See* TŪQLUQ TĪMŪR KHĀN
Turkān Khātūn 116
Turkistan 246
Ṭūs 138
al-Ṭūsī, Fakhr al-Mulk 112, 138, 155
al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn 255
al-Ṭūsī, Niẓām al-Mulk 102, 103, 112, 115, 156
Tūzūn, Amīr 264

U
ʿUbaydī Kingdom 224
ʿUjayf ibn ʿAnbasa 89
Umāma bint Zaynab 200
ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb 37, 39
ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 18, 178, 199
Umayyad caliphs
  Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 36, 63
  Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 38, 39, 40
  Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 38
  Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 59
  ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 38, 178, 199
Umayyads 37, 51, 53, 62, 64, 65, 79
  aristocrats 44
  government 36
  royalty 44
  ruling elite 36
Umm Salama 54 ﷺ
Umm ʿĀṣim 37
ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr 37

W
Wakīʿ (Imām) 71
Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 38
Warriors of the Cross 204
al-Wāsiṭī, Abū Khālid Yazīd ibn Hārūn 73
Wāthiq 84, 93

Y
Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd 50
Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab 59
Yazīd ibn Ḥawshab 51
Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik 53, 59
Yemen 41, 46
al-Yūnīnī, Quṭb al-Dīn 257, 262
Yūsuf ﷺ (Prophet) 197

Z
Ẓāhir li-Iʿzāz Dīni 'Llāh 225
zakāt 50
Zangī, Nūr al-Dīn 19, 210, 226
Zangī, Nuṣrat al-Dīn 210
Zāwiya Ghazāliyya 230
Zayd ibn Thābit 54 ﷺ
Zayd ibn ʿAlī 63
Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. *See* ʿALĪ IBN AL-ḤUSAYN
Zufar ibn Hudhayl (Imām) 75

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